Gunston Classics

THE ROVER BOYS'

IN THE MOUNTAINS

ARTHUR M. WINFIELD

Book #6

Gunston Classics

Public Domain Series

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Dinner is on the way.

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INTRODUCTION.

My dear boys: "The Rover Boys in the Mountains" is a complete story in itself, but forms the sixth volume of the "Rover Boys Series for Young Americans."

This series of books for wide-awake American lads was begun several years ago with the publication of "The Rover Boys at School." At that time the author had in mind to write not more than three volumes, relating the adventures of Dick, Tom, and Sam Rover at Putnam Hall, "On the Ocean," and "In the Jungle," but the publication of these books immediately called for a fourth, "The Rover Boys Out West," and then a fifth, "The Rover Boys on the Great Lakes." Still my young friends did not appear to be satisfied, and so I now present to them this sixth volume, which relates the stirring adventures of the three Rover boys in the Adirondacks, whither they had gone to solve the mystery of a certain brass-lined money casket found by them on an island in Lake Huron.

In writing this volume I have had a double purpose in view; not only to pen a tale which might prove pleasing to all boys, but one which might likewise give them a fair idea of the wonderful resources and natural beauty of this section of the United States. Ours is a wonderful country, and none of us can learn too much concerning it.

Again thanking my young friends for their kindness in the past, I place this volume in their hands, trusting they will find it as much to their liking as those which have preceded it.

Affectionately and sincerely yours,

ARTHUR M. WINFIELD.

THE ROVER BOYS IN THE MOUNTAINS.

CHAPTER I.

THE BOYS OF PUTNAM HALL.

"Hurrah, boys, the lake is frozen over! We'll be sure to have good skating by to-morrow afternoon!"

"That's fine news, Tom," came from Sam Rover. "I've been fairly aching for a skate ever since that cold snap of two weeks ago."

"We'll have to start up some skating matches if good skating does really turn up," put in Dick Rover, who had just joined his two brothers in the gymnasium attached to Putnam Hall. "Don't you remember those matches we had last year?"

"Certainly, Dick," answered Tom Rover. "Didn't I win one of the silver medals?"

"Gracious! but what a lot has happened since then," said Sam, who was the youngest of the trio. "We've gotten rid of nearly all of our enemies, and old Crabtree is in jail and can't bother Mrs. Stanhope or Dora any more."

"We didn't get rid of Dan Baxter," remarked Dick. "He gave us the slip nicely."

"Do you think he'll dare to bother us again, Dick?" questioned Sam anxiously.

"I hope not, but I'm not certain, Sam. The Baxters are a bad lot, as all of us know, and as Dan grows older he'll be just as wicked as his father, and maybe worse."

"What a pity a fellow like Dan can't turn over a new leaf," came from Tom Rover. "He's bright enough in his way, and would make a first-rate chap."

"It's not in the blood," went on Dick. "We'll have to keep our eyes open, that's all. If anything, Dan is probably more angry at us than ever, for he believes we were the sole means of his father being put in prison."

"Old Baxter deserved all he got," murmured Sam.

"So he did."

"Well, if Dan Baxter ever bothers me he'll catch it warm," came from Tom. "I shan't attempt to mince matters with him. Everybody at this school knows what a bully he was, and they know, too, what a rascal he's been since he left. So I say, let him beware!" And so bringing the conversation to an end for the time being, Tom Rover ran across the gymnasium floor, leaped up and grasped a turning-bar stationed there, and was soon going through a number of exercises recently taught to him by the new "gym" teacher.

"Gracious, but Tom is getting to be a regular circus gymnast!" cried Sam, as he watched his brother in admiration. "Just see what beautiful turns he is making."

"Humph! that aint so wonderful," came from someone at Sam's elbow, and turning the youngest Rover found himself close to Billy Tubbs, a short, stocky youth who had entered Putnam Hall at the opening of the fall term. Tubbs was a boy of rich parentage, and while he was not particularly a bully, he considered himself of great importance and vastly superior to the majority of his associates.

"All right, Tubby; if it isn't so wonderful, just you jump up and do it," returned Sam coldly.

"Look here, how many times have I told you not to call me Tubby!" burst out the rich youth. "I don't like it at all."

"Then what shall we call you?" asked Sam innocently. "Tubblets?"

"No, I don't want you to call me Tubblets either. My name is Tubbs—William Philander Tubbs."

"Gosh! Am I to say all that whenever I want to address you?" demanded Sam, with a pretended gasp for breath.

"I don't see why you shouldn't. It's my name."

"But Tubby—I mean Tubblets—no, Willander Philliam Tubbs—the name is altogether too long. Why, supposin' you were standing on a railroad track looking east, and an express train was coming from the west at the rate of seventy-five miles an hour, and it got to within a hundred yards of you when I discovered your truly horrible peril, and I should start to warn you of the aforesaid truly horrible peril, take my word for it, before I could utter such an elongated personal handle as that, you'd be struck and distributed along that track for a distance of a mile and a quarter. No, Tubby, my conscience wouldn't allow it—really it wouldn't." And Sam shook his head seriously.

"See here, what are you giving me?" roared Tubbs wrathfully. "Don't you worry about my standing on a railroad track and asking you to call me off." And then he added, with a red face, as a laugh went up from half a dozen students standing near: "William Philander Tubbs is my name, and I shan't answer to any other after this."

"Good for you Washtubs!" came from a boy in the rear of the crowd.

"I'd stick to that resolution, by all means, Buttertubs," came from the opposite side of the crowd.

And then one older youth, who was given to writing songs, began to sing softly:

"Rub-a-dub-dub!

One man in a tub,

  And who do you think it is,

It's William Philander,

Who's got up his dander,

  And isn't he mad! Gee whizz!"

The doggerel, gotten up on the spur of the moment, struck the fancy of fully a score of boys, big and little, and in an instant all were singing it over and over again, at the top of their lungs, and at this those who did not sing began to laugh uproariously.

"I say, what's it all about?" demanded Tom, as he slid from the turning-bar.

"Songbird Powell has composed a comic opera in Tubby's honor," answered Larry Colby, one of the Rover boys' chums. "I guess he's going to have it put on the stage after the holidays, with Tubby as leading man."

"See here, I won't have this!" roared the rich youth, waving his hand wildly first at one boy and then another. "I don't want you to make up any songs about me."

"Songbird won't charge you anything," put in Fred Garrison, another of the students. "He's a true poet, and writes for nothing. You ought to feel highly honored."

"Make a speech of thanks, that's a good fellow," put in George Granbury, another student.

"It's an outrage!" shouted Tubbs, his face growing redder each instant. "I won't stand it."

"All right, we won't charge you for sitting on it," came from the back of the crowd.

"My right name is——"

"Barrel, but they call me Tubbs for short," finished another student. "Hurrah, Tubby is discovered at last."

"Don't blush, Washtub! you don't look half as pretty as when you're pale."

"If you feel warm, Buttertub, go out and sit on the thin ice. It will soon cool you off," came from Fred Garrison.

"I'll cool you off, Garry!" burst out the rich youth, and made a wild dash at his tormentor. But somebody put out a foot and the tormented boy stumbled

headlong, at which the crowd set up another shout, and then sang louder than ever,

"Rub-a-dub-dub!

One man in a tub!"

"I say, who tripped me up!" gasped Tubbs, as soon as he could scramble up. "Tell me who did it, and I'll soon settle with him."

"Who rolled over the buttertub?" asked Tom solemnly. "One peanut reward for the first correct answer to this absorbing puzzle. Please don't all raise your hands at once."

"I believe you did it, Tom Rover!" bellowed the rich youth.

"I? Never, Tubby, my dear boy. I never rolled over a buttertub in my life. You've got the wrong number. Kindly ring the bell next door."

"Then it was Sam, and I'll fix him for it, see if I don't!"

"No, it wasn't Sam. He never touched a washtub in his life."

"I say it was Sam," cried Tubbs, who was almost beside himself with rage. "And I'm going to teach him a lesson. There, Sam Rover, how do you like that?"

As the rich youth finished, he caught the youngest Rover by the shoulder with his left hand and with his right gave Sam a slanting blow on the cheek.

"Stop! I didn't trip you!" exclaimed Sam; and then as Tubbs aimed another blow at him he ducked and broke loose and hit out in return. His blow was harder and more truly aimed than he had anticipated, and it took Tubbs directly on the nose. A spurt of blood followed, accompanied by a yell of pain, and the rich youth fell back.

"Oh! oh! My nose!"

"You brought it on yourself," retorted Sam. "I didn't——"

"Stop! stop! Boys, what does this mean?" came in a sudden stern voice, and in a moment more the two combatants found themselves confronted by Jasper Grinder, a new teacher. "Fighting, eh? How often, must you be told that such disgraceful conduct is not allowed here? You come with me, and I'll make an example of both of you."

And in a moment more the two lads found themselves prisoners in Jasper Grinder's strong grasp and being marched out of the gymnasium toward the school building proper.

CHAPTER II.

A GLIMPSE AT THE PAST.

As old readers of this series of books know, the Rover boys were three in number, Dick being the oldest, fun-loving Tom next, and small but sturdy Sam bringing up the rear of a trio of as bright and up-to-date a set of American lads as could be found anywhere.

The home of the lads was with their father, Anderson Rover, and their Uncle Randolph and Aunt Martha, on a beautiful farm at Valley Brook, in the heart of New York State. From this farm they had been sent to Putnam Hall, a semi-military institute of learning situated near Cedarville, on Cayuga Lake. This was while their father had mysteriously disappeared while on an exploring tour into the heart of Africa.

At Putnam Hall the Rover boys made a number of friends, some of whom have already been mentioned in these pages, and they likewise made several enemies. Chief among the enemies were Josiah Crabtree, a dictatorial teacher, and Dan Baxter, a bully who had done his best to make them "knuckle under" to him.

Since those first days at school many changes had taken place; so many, in fact, that but a few can be noted here. Crabtree had been discharged, and was now in prison for trying to hypnotize a lady into marrying him. This lady was Mrs. Stanhope, the mother of Dora Stanhope, who lived in the vicinity of Putnam Hall, and a girl of whom Dick Rover thought a good deal.

It had not taken the Rover boys long to discover that not only the dictatorial old teacher, but also the bully, Dan Baxter, were rascals, and, what was more, that Arnold Baxter, the father of Dan, was an old enemy to their father. Following this had come a journey to Africa and into the jungle in search of Mr. Rover, and this mission accomplished, the Rover boys had gone West to establish a mining claim in which their father was interested. This claim was

disputed by the Baxters, and when the Rovers won out and went for a pleasure trip on the Great Lakes, the Baxters did their best to bring Dick, Tom, and Sam to grief. But instead of accomplishing their purpose they failed once more, and Arnold Baxter was returned to the prison from which he had escaped some months before. What had become of Dan Baxter nobody knew, but the Rover boys were soon to learn, as we will see in the chapters which follow.

After their stirring adventures on the Great Lakes, and especially on Needle Point Island in Lake Huron, the Rover boys were glad enough to get back to dear old Putnam Hall and to their studies, even though the latter were something of a "grind," as Tom declared. They all loved Captain Victor Putnam, the owner of the institution, and it may be added here that the captain thought as much of the Rovers as he did of any of the scholars under him, and that was a good deal.

The coming of Jasper Grinder as a new under-teacher was a shock to many of the boys at the school. The principal teacher under Captain Putnam was Professor George Strong, who was stern but fair, and almost as well liked as the captain himself, and there were now several others, all of whom were on a good footing with the scholars. What had induced the captain to take in such a dictatorial and harsh master as Jasper Grinder was a mystery which nobody could explain.

As a matter of fact, Grinder had come into the Hall under a misrepresentation. He was from the Northwest, and claimed to have been a professor at a well-known California college. It was true he had once taught at this college, but his record was far from being as satisfactory as Captain Putnam had been led to believe. It was true he was a learned man,—quite the opposite of Josiah Crabtree, who had been wise only in looks,—but it was also true that he was a high-strung, passionate man, given to strange fits of anger, and that he was a miser, never spending a cent that was not absolutely required of him.

"I say, let me go!" cried Sam, as Jasper Grinder almost dragged him across the parade ground between the gymnasium and the school building. "I am not to blame for this row."

"Silence! I won't listen to a word until we are in the office," commanded the irate teacher.

"He started the whole thing," came from Tubbs. "He called me Tubby, and got the crowd to singing a song about me."

"I had nothing to do with the song, and all the boys have called you Tubby since you came here," went on Sam.

"Be quiet, I tell you!" cried Jasper Grinder, and clutched the arm of each so tightly that Tubbs set up a yell of pain. "I am master here, and I will show you how to mind."

At these words Sam's heart gave a sudden drop. It was Friday afternoon, and the next day would be, as usual, a holiday. Taking advantage of this fact Professor Strong had gone to Buffalo to visit a sick relative residing there, and only an hour before Captain Putnam had been driven away behind his team to visit an old army friend living at Fordview, twelve miles away. Professor Strong would not return until Monday morning, and it was more than likely the captain would remain away over night. During this interval Jasper Grinder would be in absolute charge of the academy and the pupils.

In a few minutes the teacher had led the way into Captain Putnam's office, and with a final pinch of their arms, which made Tubbs cry out once more with pain, he flung the pair away from him.

"Don't you know it is disgraceful to fight?" he thundered.

"We weren't fighting—that is, not exactly," said Tubbs meekly.

"Silence! I saw the whole affair. Why, your nose is still bleeding."

"I don't care. It was Rover's fault, Mr. Grinder. He started the boys, and they all began to make fun of me. He wouldn't stop——"

"And then you fought like a pair of young tigers. Disgraceful! I will have to make an example of both of you."

"I'd like to see Captain Putnam about the matter," said Sam boldly.

At these words Jasper Grinder fairly trembled with suppressed anger. "The captain is not here, and I shall deal with you as you deserve," he said.

Tubbs sank down on a chair and began to attend to his nose with his handkerchief. Sam remained standing, but his whole manner showed that he did not consider he was being treated fairly.

"What both of you boys deserve is a good thrashing," said the teacher, after a pause.

At this Sam looked his surprise. Thrashing was not permitted at the Hall. The worst that could happen to a student was to place him in solitary confinement over night, after a supper of bread and water.

"As I am not permitted by the rules to thrash you, I shall put you in the stone cell over night," went on Jasper Grinder.

"Together?" questioned Tubbs, from behind his blood-stained handkerchief.

"No. You shall go to the cell; and Rover shall be placed in the empty storeroom next to it."

"The cell is ice cold, and so is the storeroom," protested Sam.

"It is not my fault that you must be placed there, and you will have to put up with the cold," was the curt answer.

"I shan't stay in a cold room!" cried Sam. "It's not fair."

"You shall, and I'll put you there myself!" ejaculated Jasper Grinder. "Tubbs, don't dare to stir until I return."

So speaking, the unreasonable teacher caught hold of Sam once more, and despite the youngest Rover's struggles hustled him out of the office and through a long hallway, at the end of which was located the storeroom he had mentioned. The key to the room was in the lock.

"Now stay there until you are willing to behave yourself," said Jasper Grinder, and shoved Sam into the apartment. "For your impudence to me you shall go without your supper to-night."

"That remains to be seen," replied Sam, but in such a low voice that the teacher did not hear. Then the door was closed and locked, and Jasper Grinder hurried away with the key in his pocket, to make poor Tubbs a prisoner in the stone cell.

"Here's a pretty mess, and no mistake," thought Sam, as he sank on a bench, the only article of furniture the room contained. "I'm being treated worse than Tom was treated by old Crabtree when first we came to the Hall. And all because I called Tubby by his nickname! If this keeps on a fellow won't dare to breathe out loud when Grinder is around. What a passionate fellow he is at times! He glares at a fellow as if he was going to eat you up!"

While Sam remained on the bench he heard footsteps in the hallway and a howling protest from Tubbs. Then he heard the rich youth thrown into the stone cell next to the storeroom and left to his fate.

It was nipping cold, and, even with the window tightly closed and nailed over with slats, Sam could not endure it to remain on the bench long. Leaping up he began to stamp his feet and slap his arms across his chest to get them warm. Soon he heard Tubbs doing the same thing.

"I guess he's worse off than I am," thought the youngest Rover. "That stone cell hasn't any bench in it any more, and it must be twice as cold and damp as this room. It's a shame to put anyone there in this freezing weather. I don't believe Captain Putnam would stand for it if he was here."

He tried to speak to Tubbs, but the wall between was too thick, and he soon gave up the idea. Then he continued to stamp his feet and slap his arms, and even went through an imaginary prize fight, in order to warm up. It was now growing dark, and with the darkness the atmosphere of the storeroom became colder and colder.

CHAPTER III.

TOM ON A TOUR OF DISCOVERY.

Poor Sam was removed from the gymnasium so quickly that neither Dick nor Tom had time to protest, and when they reached the main door of the school building they found it shut and locked in their faces.

"Say, this is an outrage," burst out Tom. "Sam wasn't to blame for that fight. He didn't trip Tubby up."

"I know he didn't," put in Fred Garrison, who had come up also. "It was Larry Mason. But I shan't give Larry away."

"Neither will I."

"Mr. Grinder always carries matters with a high hand when the captain is away," put in Dick. "And he gets red-hot at the least little thing."

"He doesn't deserve to be a teacher here," came from George Granbury, who had followed the others. "To my way of thinking, he's worse than old Crabtree was, even though he is perhaps better educated."

"I'd like to know what he is going to do with Sam," said Dick, with a serious look on his face. "Sam has made such a good record this term I hate to see it broken."

"He'll do something to punish 'em both," came from Fred. "It will be too bad, though, if he puts 'em in the stone cell. They'll freeze to death such a night as this is going to be."

"I won't allow it," ejaculated Dick. "Why, that would be inhuman!"

"I'm going in by the back way and find out what's going on," said Tom, and promptly disappeared around the corner of the Hall. He was soon inside the building, but to his chagrin found every door leading to Captain Putnam's private apartments and to the stone cell and the storeroom locked. Having

gone through the mess-rooms and through several of the classrooms, he rejoined the others, who had gathered around the fire in what was called the students' general living room,—an apartment set aside during cold weather solely for the boys' comfort, where they might read, study, play quiet games, or do similar things in order to make themselves feel at home.

"How did you make out?" was the question immediately put.

"Made out, and that's all," said Tom gloomily.

"What do you mean?" came from Dick.

"Every blessed door is locked, and so are the windows. I can't get within two rooms of the office."

"Did you hear anything?" asked George.

"Yes; I heard a noise like somebody stamping."

"Where did it come from?"

"I think it came from the stone cell. But it sounded like somebody stamping on wood."

"Perhaps it came from the empty storeroom," cried Dick. "More than likely Mr. Grinder has placed Sam and Tubby there. I wish he'd come here. I'd question him."

"Your wish is gratified," whispered George. "Here he comes now!"

The door at the far end of the room had opened, and now Jasper Grinder came forth in a hurry. He was about to pass to another room at the rear of the school when Dick stopped him.

"Mr. Grinder, may I ask what you have done with Sam?" he asked.

"I have placed him in confinement until Captain Putnam returns," was the snappy answer.

"Did you put him in the stone cell?"

"It is not for you to question me, Rover."

"In this cold weather it isn't fit for anybody to be in that stone cell. Sam may catch his death of cold."

"I am the best judge of my own actions, Rover, and need no advice from you. Your brother has broken the rules of this school, and must suffer for so doing."

"It's inhuman to make a fellow freeze," burst out Tom. "I don't believe Captain Putnam would do that."

"Not another word from either of you," came sharply from the teacher. "Your brother will not freeze to death, but the cold may teach him a useful lesson."

"If he gets sick, I'll get my father to hold you legally responsible," went on Tom.

At these words the teacher turned slightly pale, a vision of a lawsuit with damages to pay floating across his miserly mind.

"To ease your mind Rover, let me say I'll see to it that he doesn't get sick," he said, and before Tom or Dick could question him further he passed out of the room.

"If he isn't the worst yet!" burst out Fred, who had listened with interest to what was said.

"I shan't stand it," returned Tom. "Will you, Dick?"

Dick, older and more thoughtful, mused for a moment.

"I'd certainly like to help Sam," he said. "But we must be careful and not get into trouble with Captain Putnam."

"I'm going to find my way to the door of the cell somehow," went on Tom.

"Old Grinder left that door unlocked when he came out," said George, who had joined them.

"Good! I'm going through before he comes back."

As good as his word, Tom slipped past the various tables at which the students were sitting, until he reached the door which connected with Captain Putnam's private apartments.

Usually this portion of the Hall was forbidden ground to the scholars. But Tom had been inside the rooms a number of times, so knew the way well. Passing through a private sitting room and a small library, he came to a narrow hall connecting with the main hall, at the end of which were the stone cell and the empty storeroom.

He was just about to step into the main hall when he heard somebody coming down from the floor above. The party was Mrs. Green, the housekeeper, a good-natured lady upon whom Tom had played many a joke in the past.

"Gosh! I mustn't be discovered!" he muttered, and looked around for some place to hide. Under the staircase was a recess containing a number of hooks with cloaks and overcoats, and into this he crowded, drawing one of the overcoats so as to completely cover the upper portion of his body.

Hardly had he gained the hiding place when Mrs. Green reached the lower hallway. Tom heard her pause at the foot of the stairs, strike a match, and light the big swinging lamp hanging from overhead.

"I might as well mend that overcoat now, while the captain is away," Tom heard her murmur to herself. "It's only a buttonhole that's torn out, and a tailor would charge him four times what it's worth—and he always so good at Christmas-time!"

"She's looking out for her present," thought Tom, with a grin. "But that's none of my affair. If only she isn't after this overcoat!"

He heard the housekeeper approach the recess and pause for a moment in front of it. He hardly dared to breathe, fearing that he would surely be discovered.

"Well, I declare, if he hasn't gone and worn the very overcoat itself!" he heard Mrs. Green cry. "Just like him, and two good coats a-hanging here. Well, I suppose it's the warmest he's got, and he'll have a cold ride back, especially if he returns to-night." And so speaking Mrs. Green hurried away.

"A narrow shave, and no mistake," murmured Tom to himself, and listened until he heard a distant door close. Then all was quiet, save the distant murmur of the student's voices, coming from the sitting room.

Without losing more time, Tom left the recess and hurried to the door of the stone cell.

"Sam!" he called out softly. "Are you in there?"

"No; *I'm* in here," came in the voice of Tubbs. "And—I'm almost frozen to—to—death." The last words with a chattering of teeth that told only too plainly how the rich youth was suffering.

"Sorry for you, Tubby, really I am. But where is Sam?"

"In the—the storeroom. Oh, Rover, won't you please ask Mr. Grinder to let me out? I'll freeze to death here, I know I will!"

"I'll do what I can. But he won't let you out. He isn't that kind of a fellow."

"You might buy him off, Rover. I've heard he's a regular miser, and I'll give you five dollars of my Christmas money if he'll let me go."

"I'll see what I can do after I've talked to Sam." And so speaking Tom hurried to the door of the storeroom.

"Tom, is it really you?" cried the youngest Rover joyfully.

"Yes. How are you making out?"

"Horribly. I believe my feet and ears are already frozen!"

"Grinder is a beast to put you in here, Sam."

"I know that well enough. He won't give me any supper, I'm afraid."

"Then I'll try to get some supper to you."

"Is the key of this door on a hook outside?"

"No. If it was I'd have the door open long ago."

Sam gave a deep sigh, and then began to dance around once more to keep warm.

"Perhaps I can find a key to fit this lock," went on Tom. "I know there are keys in some of the other doors."

He ran off and soon returned with four keys, which he tried, one after another. The third was a fair fit, and with an effort the bolt of the lock was forced back.

"Hurrah! the door's open!" exclaimed Tom. "Now you can go where you please."

"Then you wouldn't stay here?" questioned Sam anxiously.

"Not much! I'd hide in one of the dormitories, and I wouldn't show myself until Captain Putnam gets back. I'll see to it that you get something to eat, and when the captain returns you can tell him that if you had remained in this place all night you would have been frozen to death."

Sam was willing enough to take Tom's advice, and was soon in the hallway. Then the door was locked again.

"It's heartless to leave poor Tubby in that cell," said Tom. "Let's get him out too."

"All right—if you can find a key to fit the lock."

Losing no time, the brothers tried one key after another in the lock to the door of the stone cell.

"Who's that?" came in a chatter from Tubbs.

"Tom Rover," was the answer. "I've just released Sam, and now we are going to release you, if we can."

"Good for you Rover."

"There she goes!" cried Tom a few seconds later, and in a moment more the door was opened and Tubbs stood in the hallway with the Rover boys.

Tubbs was about to say something, when Sam suddenly caught him by the arm.

"Hush!" he whispered. "Somebody is coming! I hope it isn't old Grinder!"

CHAPTER IV.

DORMITORY NUMBER TWO.

For the moment none of the three students knew what to do. They felt that if the approaching personage should be Jasper Grinder there would certainly be "a warm time of it," to say the least.

Yet the approaching man was not the teacher, but Peleg Snuggers, the man of all work around the Hall, a good-natured individual, well liked by nearly all the students. Snuggers was in the habit of taking many a joke from the scholars, yet he rarely retaliated, contenting himself with the saying that "boys will be boys."

"It's Snuggers!" whispered Sam, after a painful pause. "What shall we do?"

"Perhaps we can get him to keep quiet," returned Tom, also in a low voice. "He's a pretty good sort."

"Do—don't trust him," put in Tubbs, in a trembling voice. "If I'm put back in that cell I'll die; I know I will!"

"I have it," said Tom, struck by a sudden idea. "Into the storeroom with you, quick!

"But he may be coming after me!" said Sam.

"Never mind—I'll fix it. Be quick, or the game will be up!"

On tiptoe the three students hurried into the storeroom and Tom shut the door noiselessly. Then he slipped the key he still held into the lock and turned it.

"Now groan, Sam," he whispered. "Pretend to be nearly dead, and ask Peleg to bring Grinder here."

Catching the idea, Sam began to moan and groan most dismally, in the midst of which Peleg Snuggers came up.

"Poor boy, I reckon as how he's nearly stiff from the cold," murmured Snuggers. "And this bread and water won't warm him up nohow. I've most a mind to bring him some hot tea on the sly, and a sandwich, too."

The general utility man tried to insert a key in the lock, but failed on account of the key on the inside.

"Oh! oh!" moaned Sam. "Help! help!"

"What's the row?" questioned Snuggers.

"Is that you, Snuggers?"

"Yes, Master Rover."

"I'm most frozen to death! My feet and ears are frozen stiff already!"

"It's a shame!"

"Tell Mr. Grinder to come here."

"He won't come, I'm afraid. He just sent me with some bread and water for you and for Master Tubbs."

"Water? Do you want me to turn into ice? Oh, Snuggers, please send him. I know I can't stand this half an hour longer. I'll be a corpse!"

"All right, I'll fetch him," answered Snuggers. And setting down the pitcher of water and loaf of bread he had been carrying he hurried off.

"Now is our time!" whispered Tom, as soon as he was certain the man of all work was gone.

"But which way shall we go?" questioned Sam

"Follow me, and I'll show you."

Leaving the storeroom, Tom led the way through the semi-dark hallway and up the stairs. At the rear of the upper hall was a bedroom reserved for the captain's private guests.

"Come in here for the present," said Tom. "And when I tap on the window unlock the sash and be prepared to climb from the window to the next, which connects with Dormitory No. 2."

"Good for you!" said Sam. "But how are you going to get to the dormitory?"

"Leave that to me."

Leaving Sam and Tubbs to take care of themselves, Tom left the bedroom and walked out in the upper hall once more.

He was just in time to hear Peleg Snuggers returning with Jasper Grinder.

"It's all nonsense," he heard, in the teacher's harsh voice. "The cold will do both of the boys good."

"He said he was half frozen," insisted Snuggers. "If anything serious-like happened to them, I dunno what the captain would say."

"I know nothing serious will happen," growled Jasper Grinder. "He was merely trying to work upon your sympathies. Both could stay there till morning easily enough."

"The wretch!" murmured Tom to himself. "I'm mighty glad I let them out!"

A few seconds later he heard a cry of dismay.

"Rover is gone!"

"Gone?" came from Snuggers.

"Yes, gone. Snuggers did you leave the door unlocked?"

"No, sir, I couldn't get the key in the lock. Here it is." And the general utility man produced it.

"Ah! here is a key on the inside. What can this mean?"

"I don't know, sir. I left him a-groanin' only a few minutes ago."

"It is very strange." Jasper Grinder gazed around the empty storeroom. "Did you hear anything from Master Tubbs?"

"No, sir."

The teacher stepped out of the storeroom and made his way to the stone cell.

"He is gone too!" he ejaculated.

"Really, sir, did you say 'gone'?" cried Peleg Snuggers, in dismay.

"Yes. This is—ah—outrageous, Snuggers. Where can they be?"

"I'm sure I don't know, sir. Master Rover got out mighty quick."

"Look for them among the students, and if you find them bring them to me at once."

"I will, sir."

As soon as Peleg Snuggers had departed Jasper Grinder looked around the storeroom and the stone cell to learn if he could find any trace of the boys.

This gave Tom the chance to slip through the captain's private rooms and into the students' quarters.

"Well, how did you make out?" was Dick's impatient question. "You've been gone an age."

"Come with me and I'll tell you," said Tom, and taking his brother and several chums aside he related what had occurred.

"Keep them there all night, and on bread and water!" cried Dick. "It is awful. I'm sure the captain won't stand for it."

"To be sure he won't," came from Fred Garrison. "But what are you going to do next?"

"Let them in the dormitory window."

Tom led the way upstairs and into Dormitory No. 2. There were four windows in a row, and six beds, three occupied by the Rovers and the others by Fred, Larry, and George Granbury.

Going to the corner window Tom threw it wide open. It was growing dark outside, for it was now half-past six. As he stuck his head out of the window there was the rattle of a drum down in the mess hall.

"Supper time!" cried Fred.

"You go down," said Tom. "No use of all of us being late."

"No, you go down," answered Dick. "You've run risk enough. Besides, if you are absent from the crowd too long somebody may grow suspicious of you. I'll help Sam and Tubbs to a safe hiding-place."

"Find out if they are there first—and lock the door after we are gone."

Leaning out of the window Dick tapped on the next glass. At once Sam showed himself.

"It's quite a climb, but I reckon I can make it," said the youngest Rover.

Waiting to hear no more, Tom hurried below, followed by Fred, and mingled with the crowd of students entering the mess hall.

Many of the boys were talking about the quarrel between Sam and Tubbs, and all condemned the actions of Jasper Grinder.

"He ought to have set them to doing extra lessons; that would have been punishment enough," said one of the big boys, who was captain of Company A of the students for that term.

This opinion was that held by the majority. Several of the boys came to Tom to learn what he had to say. But he merely shrugged his shoulders.

"Wait and we'll see what we will see," he said

"Rover's got a card up his sleeve, that's as sure as you're born," said one of the students, and winked at Tom. But Tom only looked wise and turned away.

When the students sat down to eat it was noticed that Dick's chair was vacant.

"Master Thomas Rover, do you know anything of your brother Richard?" asked an under-teacher.

"Perhaps he is having a talk with Mr. Grinder," said Tom.

"Oh!" Then the under-teacher noticed that Mr. Grinder's chair was also vacant, and said no more.

While the boys were eating, Peleg Snuggers came to the door and looked carefully about the mess hall.

"You won't find them here, Peleg," said Tom to himself. Then the man of all work disappeared, and the supper continued as if nothing out of the ordinary was happening.

CHAPTER V.

A SCENE IN THE SCHOOLROOM.

In the meantime, what of affairs in the dormitory? Was all going as quietly as Tom had anticipated?

As soon as Tom went below Dick locked the door, then turned again to the window. Sam was trying to climb from one room to the next, but could not get a satisfactory hold.

"Here, give me your hand," cried Dick softly, and reaching forth he soon helped his brother to a position of safety.

"Say, aint it dangerous?" asked Tubbs anxiously, as he gazed to the ground, twenty feet below.

"You've got to run some risks, Tubbs," said Dick. "Quick, or you may be too late."

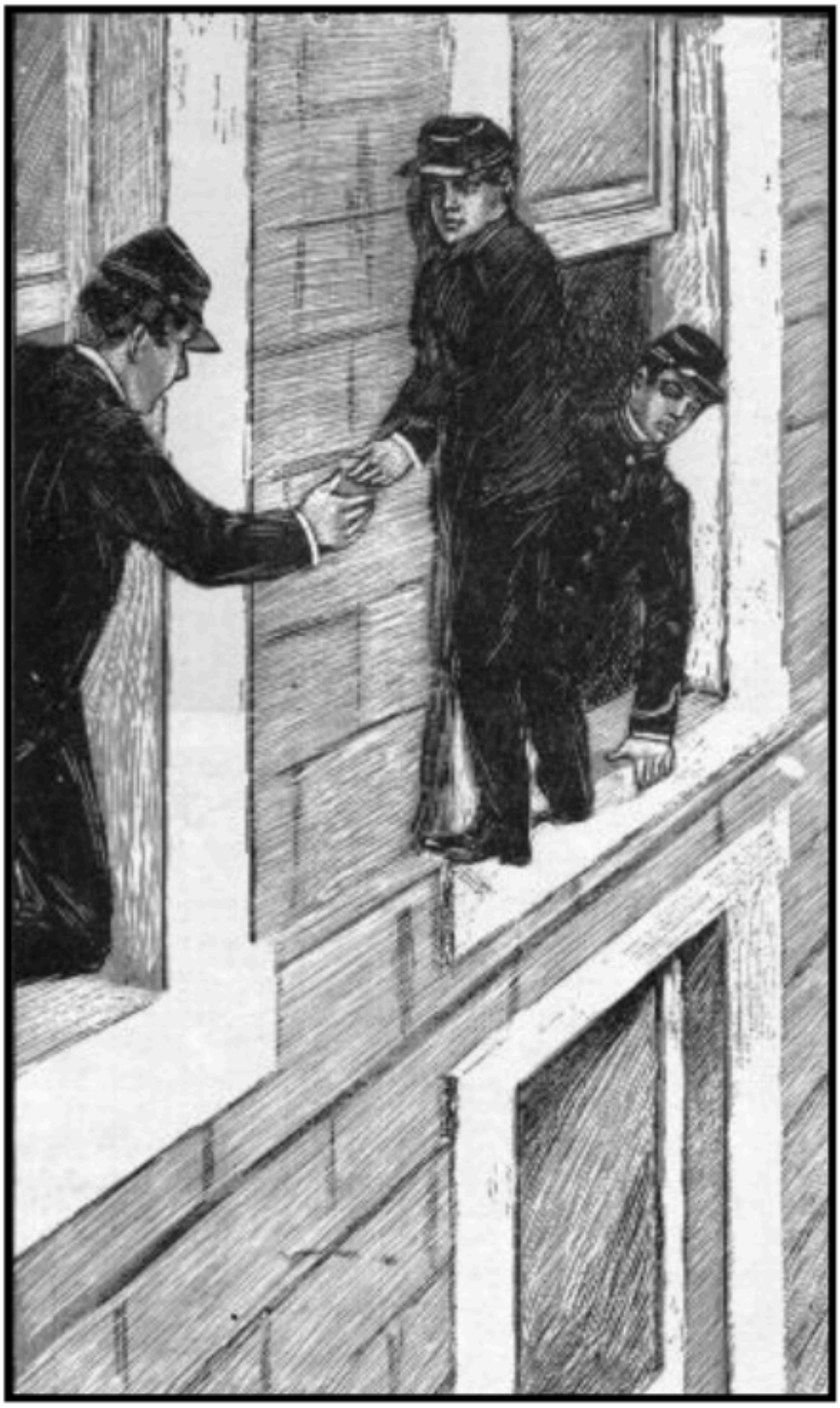
Fearful of a fall, the rich youth put out one foot and a hand. Dick tried to reach him, but was unable to do so.

"A little further, Tubbs," he said encouragingly.

"I—I'm afraid I'll fall," was the trembling answer. Then the rich youth let out a cry of alarm. "Somebody is coming!"

"Come," cried Dick, and reached out a trifle further. As Tubbs gave the eldest Rover his fingers Dick hauled him from the window and literally swung him into the dormitory. Then, as Tubbs landed in a heap on the floor, Sam closed the window and locked it.

"Now you must clear out to another room!" cried Dick. "Whoever was coming will find that window wide open, and guess you have escaped in this direction."



A perilous climb!

"But where can we go to?" asked the rich youth.

"Go to Dormitory No. 6. Only young Adler is in there, and Hemmingway, and they are on a vacation until after Christmas. The closet is a big one, and you can both hide on the upper shelf. Quick! I'll bring you some supper."

All three left the dormitory, and Sam and Tubbs scurried off in the direction indicated. As for Dick, he lost no time in reaching the mess hall.

"Sorry, sir," he said to the under-teacher. "The bell couldn't have rung very loud."

"It rang as loud as usual," was the answer, and no more was said, the teacher's head being just then full of other matters.

Glad to get off so easily, Dick lost no time in eating his supper. While making way with the food he stowed a goodly portion in his pockets, in a couple of spare napkins, and by some silent motions from Tom learned that his brother was doing the same.

Just as the students were finishing the meal, Jasper Grinder came in and walked down the aisles between the tables. He looked both angry and perplexed. As he came close to Tom he paused.

"Excuse me, Mr. Grinder, but won't you let Sam out of the stone cell?" asked Tom, to avoid being questioned.

"You be silent Rover," muttered the teacher, and passed on without saying more.

After the supper hour it was usual for the students to have half an hour to themselves, during which they might read, play games, or do as they pleased. But now Mr. Grinder called them together in the main classroom.

"I wish to talk to you young gentlemen," said the teacher, when all were seated.

"We're going to catch it now," whispered Tom to Dick. "Don't you give the secret away."

"Indeed I won't," answered the eldest Rover. "I intend to lay the whole case before Captain Putnam as soon as he returns."

"Silence!" thundered Jasper Grinder. "I want you boys to stop talking instantly."

"I didn't say anything," murmured several in an undertone.

"Silence, I say!" repeated the master, and then all became so quiet that the ticking of the clock could be heard distinctly.

The teacher gazed around at the scores of faces and looked more stem than ever.

"I am going to question all of you separately, and I trust each of you will tell the truth. The question is, Do you know what has become of Samuel Rover and William Tubbs? or Do you know what they have done? I shall start with the first boy. Hickley, what have you to say?"

"I don't know anything about them," answered the boy named Hickley.

"Brainard, do you know?"

"No, sir."

"Parkham?"

"I know they had a little set-to in the gymnasium, but that's all. The whole thing was a friendly bout, I guess."

"I am the best judge of that. It was a disgraceful fight. What have you to say, Griggs?"

"If you say it was disgraceful I suppose it was, sir. I thought it was only a friendly dispute——"

"Stop! I want you to answer the original questions, yes, or no."

"No."

"No, what?"

"No, to both original questions."

"No, sir!" and Jasper Grinder stamped his foot.

"Oh! All right, sir. No, sir, to both questions, sir."

There was a titter at this, which caused Jasper Grinder to grow red in the face.

"Boys, be quiet!" he shouted. "If you do not be still I will keep all of you in to-morrow."

As this would have spoiled the chances for a good skate and some exciting races, the boys immediately subsided. Then the questioning went on until Dick Rover was reached.

"I don't know where Sam and Tubbs are now," said Dick. "Perhaps they are frozen stiff."

"Did you aid them in escaping from the stone cell and the storeroom?"

"No, sir."

"Have you seen them since I placed them there?"

"Yes, I have," answered Dick boldly, seeing it was useless to beat about the bush longer.

"Oh! Then you did aid them to escape?"

"Not from the stone cell and the storeroom. I met them after they had escaped."

"Where did you see them last?"

"I decline to answer that question."

"Decline!" thundered Jasper Grinder.

"I do, sir. As soon as Captain Putnam arrives I shall lay this whole matter before him, and learn if you have any authority for placing my brother in a place where he is liable to catch a cold which may give him pneumonia and be the cause of his death. As it is, my brother suffered a great deal, and so did Tubbs, and if they get sick from it you may be sure that you will be held legally accountable. It was an inhuman thing to do."

As Dick finished there was a murmur, and then a number of the students broke out into applause, while Tom clapped his hands as hard as he could. Jasper Grinder stood at his desk dumbstruck, with his face growing paler each instant.

"Silence! silence!" he exclaimed, when he could control his voice. "Silence, I say, or I will cane you all! This is—is most unseemly—it is—er—mutiny! Silence!"

"I mean just what I say, Mr. Grinder," went on Dick, when he could be heard. "You are master here, and we are bound to obey you, in certain things. But you shan't keep my brother in an icy room all night, and on a supper of stale bread and cold water. Such treatment would almost make a mule sick."

"Rover, will you be silent, or must I get the cane?" gasped Jasper Grinder, almost beside himself with rage.

"If you get your cane, sir, you won't hit me more than once with it."

"Won't I? We'll see who is master here."

"My gracious! Is he really going to try to cane you, Dick!" exclaimed Tom.

"I suppose he is," was the cool answer. "He is so angry he doesn't know what he is doing."

Rushing from the classroom Jasper Grinder presently reappeared, carrying a cane which looked as if it might hurt a good deal, if vigorously applied.

Tom could not help but grin. Dick was almost as tall as the school-teacher, and probably just as strong, and the idea of a caning appeared ridiculous in the extreme.

Caning was not allowed at Putnam Hall, but evidently Jasper Grinder meant to take matters in his own hands.

"Richard Rover, come up here," he thundered.

"What for, sir?"

"To receive the punishment you so richly deserve."

"Mr. Grinder, you haven't any right to cane me. It's against Captain Putnam's rules."

"I don't care for the rules—I mean, you have acted in such an outrageous manner that I must do whatever I think necessary to uphold law and order."

"I am willing to stand whatever punishment Captain Putnam sees fit to inflict. But I shall not take a caning from you."

"Won't you? We'll see."

As Jasper Grinder spoke he leaped from the platform and strode rapidly toward the spot where Dick was standing.

The eldest Rover did not budge, but remained where he was, eying the enraged school-teacher determinedly.

"Don't you dare to strike!" he said warningly, as the cane was raised over his head.

"I will!" cried Jasper Grinder, and was about to bring the cane down with all force when Tom caught it from behind and wrenched it from his grasp.

CHAPTER VI.

NEWS OF AN OLD ENEMY.

Dick had not intended that the cane should hit him. He was prepared to dodge. But he wanted to make certain that Jasper Grinder would really try to carry out his ill-advised threat.

"Hi! give me that cane!" cried the schoolmaster, as he whirled around.

"I shall not," answered Tom, and began to run down one of the aisles to the door.

Instantly Jasper Grinder made after him. But the boys had gathered in a crowd, and it was with difficulty that the man could get through.

As Tom ran for one door Dick ran for another, and it was not long before both met in a hallway leading to the mess hall and the dormitories.

"Dick, what shall we do next?" questioned Tom. "We can't stay here, that's certain."

"We'll get out," answered Dick. "I think Mrs. Stanhope will keep us all night."

"And if she won't, I know the Lanings will," said Tom, with a grin.

"We must let Sam know," went on Dick. "He can go along. I shan't come back until Captain Putnam returns."

"Right you are."

Up the stairs they rushed, and into the dormitory where Sam and Tubbs were in hiding.

"Sam!" called Dick, and the youngest Rover at once appeared.

"What's up now? What are you in such a hurry for?"

"Get your overcoat and hat, and come on. We are going to the Stanhopes for the night. Here, Tubbs, is some supper," and Dick passed over what he had in the napkins, while Tom did the same.

"Thanks," said the rich boy. "But—but must I stay here alone?"

"I don't think we can take you along," answered Dick. "But you want to be careful. Old Grinder is as mad as a hornet. He was going to cane me for helping you two. Come, Sam, there is no time to waste. Tubbs, you had better let Fred Garrison know where you are. He's all right."

In a moment more Dick, Tom, and Sam were in their own room and putting on their heavy overcoats and their hats. They lost no time, and as they heard Jasper Grinder coming up one flight of stairs they ran down another pair leading into the kitchen.

Here the servants, directed by Mrs. Green, were putting away what was left of the students' supper.

"Oh, dear!" burst out the matron, on catching sight of the boys. "What do you want here?"

"Good-by, Mrs. Green," said Dick. "Tell the captain when he comes that we were driven away from the school by Mr. Grinder, and that we'll return as soon as we learn that he is back." And before the housekeeper could answer they opened the kitchen door and ran outside.

It was a dark night and the air was filled with snow, some of which was already sifting lazily downward. But they knew the way well, so the want of light did hot bother them. They crossed the parade ground on a run and made directly for the road leading to the Stanhopes' cottage.

"I reckon it will be quite a surprise for Mrs. Stanhope and Dora," said Tom, after they had told Sam of what had happened in the school-room. "They won't be looking for us."

"I know they'll treat us well," said Dick.

"To be sure they will—especially after all we did for them on the Lakes," put in Sam. "But let me tell you, I am curious to know how this thing is going to end."

"I think Mr. Grinder will get the worst of it," returned Tom confidently. "He must know he was doing wrong to put you in that icy storeroom and poor Tubbs in the stone cell. How did you make out with Tubbs in the closet?"

"Oh, he became quite friendly, and we decided to let the past drop. I promised I wouldn't call him Tubby any more."

"That's fair," came from Dick. "He isn't such a bad sort."

On and on hurried the boys. The road was a somewhat lonely one, with several patches of woods to be passed. Several times they halted, endeavoring to ascertain if they were being pursued. But all remained silent. The snow was now coming down more thickly than ever.

"What a lot of adventures we have had in these woods," observed Tom, during one of the halts. "Don't you remember the tramp who stole the watch, and the rows with Josiah Crabtree and with Arnold Baxter and Dan?"

"Indeed I do," said Sam. "Mrs. Stanhope and Dora must be glad to be rid of old Crabtree and Arnold Baxter."

"It's a pity Dan Baxter wasn't locked up with his father," said Dick. "Don't you remember how he used to bother Dora and the Laning girls?"

"Do you think he'd bother them now?" asked Sam. "If he bothers Grace Laning he had better look out for me."

"That's right, Sam, stand up for your own particular girl——" began Tom.

"I didn't say she was my girl," cried Sam, and he was glad that the darkness hid his red-growing face. "I'm no more sweet on her than you are on her sister Nellie."

"It's Dick who must lead off, with Dora Stanhope——" went on Tom.

"Oh, stow it, and come on!" burst in Dick. "If you keep on talking you'll surely be caught. Grinder may be coming after us in a carriage."

"If we had our bicycles we could get there in no time," said Sam.

"Yes, and we might break our necks in the dark," added Dick. "Come, we haven't more than a mile further to go."

On the three trudged, through the snow, which was coming down faster each instant. Once they thought they heard carriage wheels behind them, but soon the sounds faded away in the distance.

At last they came in sight of the Stanhope cottage. A bright light was streaming from the sitting-room windows, and looking in they saw Dora sitting at the table reading a book, and Mrs. Stanhope resting comfortably in an easy-chair in front of the bright-burning fire.

Dora herself came to the door in answer to their ring. "Why, mamma, it's the Rovers!" she cried, as she shook hands, "I never expected to see you to-night, in such a snowstorm. How kind of Captain Putnam to let you come."

"The captain had nothing to do with it," answered Dick, as he gave her hand an extra squeeze, which he somehow thought she returned. "We came because we were having a lot of trouble, and didn't know what else to do."

"More trouble!" came from Mrs. Stanhope, as she also greeted them. "I was hoping all our troubles were a thing of the past."

"This isn't any trouble for you," answered Dick. "Excepting that it brings trouble through your giving us shelter for the night."

"If that's the case, then let it bring trouble," put in Dora promptly. "But what is it all about."

"I'll tell you presently, Dora. But in the meantime can you give Sam some supper? He hasn't had a mouthful since dinner time."

"You poor boy!" came from Mrs. Stanhope. "To be sure he shall have his supper. I'll tell Mary to prepare it at once," and she bustled from the room to give the servant the necessary directions, and returned at once.

Sitting down in front of the fire the three boys told their tale, Mrs. Stanhope and Dora listening with keen attention. When Dick got to the point where Jasper Grinder had wanted to thrash him Dora gave a scream.

"Oh, Dick, the idea! Why, he really must be crazy!"

"I believe his passion got the best of him," said the eldest Rover.

"I'm glad Tom took the cane away," went on Dora.

"It is really too bad," observed Mrs. Stanhope, when their story was finished. "I quite agree with you that Captain Putnam will not uphold Mr. Grinder in his inhuman course. Of course you must stay here to-night, and as long after that as you please."

It was not long before supper was ready for Sam, and when he entered the dining room Mrs. Stanhope went along, to see that he got all he desired.

"I am awfully glad you came," said Dora, in a low voice, when she was alone with Dick and Tom. "I have something important to tell you, something I didn't wish to mention in front of mamma, for it will only worry her without doing any good."

"And what is it?" asked Tom and Dick, in a breath.

"I was down to Cedarville yesterday to do some shopping, and I am almost certain that I saw Dan Baxter hanging around the hotel there."

"Dan Baxter!" ejaculated Dick.

"Hush, Dick! not so loud. Yes, Dan Baxter. He was on the hotel stoop, but the minute he saw me he went inside."

"Perhaps you are mistaken," said Tom. "I hardly think he'd dare to show himself here."

"At first I was uncertain about it. But when I came back that way I looked again, and I caught him peeping out at me from one of the bar-room windows. As soon as he saw me look he dodged out of sight."

"If Dan Baxter is in this neighborhood, he is here for no good," was Dick's blunt comment. "Evidently he has not forgiven us for helping to put his father back in jail."

"Dan Baxter is not of a forgiving nature, Dick. You must be careful, or he will make trouble for all three of you."

"We can take care of ourselves, Dora. If only he doesn't annoy you and your mother."

"I don't think he'll do that—now Mr. Crabtree is out of it," answered Dora, and then, as Mrs. Stanhope re-entered the room, the subject was dropped.

CHAPTER VII.

SOMETHING OF A SURPRISE.

Despite the stirring events which had just passed the Rovers managed to pass a pleasant evening at the Stanhope cottage. This was in a large measure due to Dora, who did all she could to entertain them and make them forget their troubles. All played games, and Dora played the piano and sang for them, while Dick and Tom also took a hand at the singing. Sam could not sing, and declared that he was certainly getting a cold, whether from being in the storeroom or not.

At ten o'clock the boys retired, to a large bed chamber containing a double bed and a good-sized cot. They were soon undressed, and after saying their prayers dropped asleep and slept soundly until seven in the morning.

When they arose a surprise awaited them. On the ground outside the snow lay to the depth of a foot or more, and it was still showing as heavily as ever.

"Hullo! we are snowed in!" exclaimed Sam, as he gazed out on the whitened landscape.

"Sure enough," returned Dick, and added:

"This looks as if Captain Putnam might not come back to-day,"

"If that's the case, I vote we stay here," put in Tom. "I'm sure Mrs. Stanhope will keep us."

It was found that Sam's cold had attacked him in earnest. He was very hoarse, and complained of a severe pain in the chest.

"You'll have to do something for that cold," said Dick. "Better stay in bed this morning, and let Mrs. Stanhope put a plaster on your chest."

Going below, he told the lady of the cottage of his brother's condition. A mustard draught was at once prepared and placed upon Sam, and he was also

given some pine tar cough mixture. These things relieved him somewhat, but Mrs. Stanhope insisted upon it that he remain in bed, and brought him his breakfast with her own hands.

"Of course you must stay here, especially since Sam is sick," said Dora, while they were eating a breakfast of buckwheat cakes, honey, chops, and coffee. "He may not get worse, but if he does, one of you will have to take the horse and go for the doctor."

"Yes, we'll have to watch Sam," answered Dick. "But don't put yourselves to too much trouble on our account."

"As if we could take too much trouble for you!" exclaimed Dora, and blushed sweetly. It was not likely that she would ever forget all the Rovers had done for her and her mother.

Tom was anxious to learn about the Lanings, and was told that they were all at home and doing finely.

"Nellie and Grace are going on a visit to an aunt at Timber Run after the holidays," said Dora. "They wanted me to go along, but I didn't care to leave mamma, and we didn't wish to lock up the house for fear some tramps might break in and rob us."

After breakfast Sam said he felt like sitting up, but toward noon his chest began to hurt him again, and Mrs. Stanhope said it would be best that somebody go for a doctor. Dick and Tom both volunteered, but it was finally decided that Dick should go alone, on horseback.

A steed was soon saddled, and off Dick rode, wrapped in his overcoat and with an old fur cap pulled well down over his ears. It had now stopped snowing, so the weather was not quite as unpleasant as it had been.

Dick was bound for the house of Dr. Fremley, a physician he knew well, and thither he made his way as speedily as the horse could plow through the drifts which presented themselves. At times, when the wind arose, it was nipping cold, and the youth was glad to get in where it was warm when the physician's office in Cedarville was reached.

"Certainly, I will come and see your brother," said Dr. Fremley. "I'll be ready to go in about half an hour."

"Will you go on horseback?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll wait in town and go back with you," said Dick. "I wish to make a purchase or two."

It was agreed that the youth should meet the physician at half-past twelve, and leaving his horse in the latter's stable, Dick walked down the main street of Cedarville.

He had his Christmas money with him, and entering a drug store he bought a cup of hot chocolate, that warmed him considerably. After this he selected a bottle of cologne and a box of chocolates as a Christmas gift for Dora.

Opposite to the drug store was a stationery and book store, and here Dick procured a fancy floral calendar for Mrs. Stanhope and an interesting girl's book for Dora.

From the store Dick could obtain a side view of the Cedarville Hotel, which stood on a corner up the street, and having paid for his purchases the youth stood near the door and watched the hotel, wondering at the same time if he would see anything of Dan Baxter.

Presently a number of men came from the bar-room of the hotel and moved in various directions. With one of these was the youth for whom Dick was looking.

Dan Baxter and his companion moved in the direction of the lake shore, and Dick lost no time in following the pair.

The man with Baxter was a stranger to Dick, but he showed by his manner that he was a rough individual, and when he talked he did a great deal of swearing, which, however, will not appear in his conversation in these pages.

Having reached the road running along the lake front, Baxter and his companion, whose name was Lemuel Husty, passed northward past a

straggling row of cottages and then on the road leading to the village of Neckport.

"I wish I had time—I'd follow them," said Dick to himself, and turned back, much disappointed over the fact that he had not had a chance to speak to Dan Baxter.

As Dick turned in the direction of the doctor's office once more he was hailed by a lad of the village, named Harry Sharp.

"Hullo, Dick Rover!"

"How are you Harry? How do you like the snow?"

"All right enough, only it will spoil some of the skating."

"So I've been thinking," answered Dick, as the two came closer.

"Say, Dick, who do you suppose I met a while ago," went on Harry Sharp.

"I don't know—Dan Baxter?"

"That's the chap. How did you guess it?"

"I saw him myself."

"I thought he didn't dare to show himself?"

"Well, he ought to be arrested, Harry. But perhaps having his father in prison, and losing most of his money, is punishment enough for him."

"I met him in the post office. He was posting several letters."

"Did you see the handwriting on the letters?"

"No. As soon as he saw me he slid out of sight."

"I guess he doesn't fancy being recognized. By the way, have you seen Captain Putnam?"

"Saw him about an hour ago. I think he was going to the Hall."

"Good enough! I was waiting for him to get back."

A few words more followed, and the two boys separated, and Dick hurried to the doctor's office. Dr. Fremley was ready to leave, and soon the pair were on the way to the Stanhope cottage.

Not wishing to give the Hall a bad name Dick deemed it advisable to say nothing about the fact that Sam had been locked in an ice-cold room without his overcoat or hat, and merely stated that his brother had exposed himself.

"He has a very heavy cold," said the doctor, after an examination. "If let run, it would have become serious, beyond a doubt; but I feel confident I can check it," and he left some medicine and some plasters.

As soon as the doctor was gone Dick announced his intention of returning to Putnam Academy. "The captain has got back, and I want to lay the whole case before him, and do it, too while Sam is still sick."

"Shall I go along?" asked Tom.

"No, I'll go alone. They may need you here on Sam's account."

Dick was soon on the way, riding another horse, for the Stanhopes now kept two. He had had a fine dinner, and felt in the best of spirits, despite the disagreeable task before him. He did not doubt for a moment but that Captain Putnam would side with him and condemn the actions of Jasper Grinder.

He was still out of sight of the Hall when he saw Peleg Snuggers riding toward him in the captain's cutter.

"Is that you, Master Rover!" sang out the man of all work. "Where are your brothers?"

"Safe, Snuggers. Has the captain got back?"

"Yes—got in a couple of hours ago."

"Has he said anything about our going away?"

"Said anything? Just guess he has. Why, the whole school is so upset nobody knows what he is doing. Do you know what happened after you and your brothers ran away?"

"Of course I don't. What did happen?"

"Mr. Grinder had a terrible row with more than a dozen of the boys, who sided with what you had done. He got awfully mad at them, and was going to cane the lot, when all of a sudden he fell down in a fit, just like he was going to die, and we had to work over him most an hour before we could bring him around."

CHAPTER VIII.

JASPER GRINDER IS DISMISSED.

Dick was greatly surprised over the news which Peleg Snuggers conveyed to him. He knew that Jasper Grinder was an intensely passionate man when aroused, as on the occasion of the attempted caning, but he had not imagined that the man would fall into a fit while in such a condition.

"Did he come out of the fit all right?" he questioned soberly.

"When he came around he was as weak as a rag, and I and one of the big boys had to help him up to his room. He stayed there the rest of the evening, and the other teachers had to take charge."

"What do they say about the matter?"

"As soon as the captain got back all of 'em got in the private office and held a long talk. Then the captain had a talk with Mr. Grinder, and after that the captain sent me off to look for you. He said you must be at the Lanings, or at Mrs. Stanhope's, or else somewhere in Cedarville."

"We are stopping with Mrs. Stanhope. Sam is sick with a heavy cold."

"It's not to be wondered at. Master Tubbs has a cold, too, and the captain had Mrs. Green give him some medicine for it."

"Has he punished Tubbs?"

"No. He's awfully upset, and I don't think he'll do anything right away," concluded the general utility man.

The cutter was turned around, and Dick and Snuggers hurried toward the Hall. Their coming was noticed by a score of boys who were snowballing each other oh the parade ground, and a shout went up.

"Dick Rover is coming back! Snuggers has brought Dick Rover back!"

"Take care of the horse, Snuggers," said Dick. "Do the right thing, and I won't forget to pay you at Christmas-time."

"All right Master Rover; thank you," answered the man of all work.

Dick was at once surrounded, but before he could answer any questions he saw Captain Putnam appear at one of the windows and at once went inside to greet him.

"Well, Rover, what does all this mean?" demanded the head of the school, but there was not much sternness in his tone.

"It means Captain Putnam, that Sam, Tom, and I couldn't stand the treatment we received from Mr. Grinder. For a little set-to which Sam and Tubbs had in the gymnasium Mr. Grinder put Sam in the ice-cold storeroom, and was going to keep him there all night, with nothing but stale bread to eat and cold water to drink. If Sam had remained in the storeroom he would have died from the effects of it. As it is, he is now in bed at Mrs. Stanhope's, and we had to call in Dr. Fremley to attend him."

"Is he very ill, Rover? Tell me the exact truth."

"I have never told you anything else, Captain Putnam. No, I don't think he is very ill, but he's got a bad cold. He is very hoarse, and he complained of such a pain in the chest that Mrs. Stanhope put on some plasters, and when the doctor came he left some more."

"Humph!" Captain Putnam began to walk up and down his private office. "What did you tell Dr. Fremley?"

"Nothing but that Sam had exposed himself. I didn't want to give the school a black name. But one thing is certain, we can't remain here if Mr. Grinder is going to stay. I shall write to my father and tell him the full particulars."

"It will not be necessary to do so, Richard." The captain caught Dick by the shoulder. "I have investigated this affair, and while I find that Sam was to blame, and Tom and you, too, yet I am convinced that Mr. Grinder exceeded his authority here. He had no business to put Sam in the storeroom and Master Tubbs in the stone cell in this freezing weather. More than that, something happened after you left that shows plainly Mr. Grinder is not the

proper person to be a teacher here, and from to-day I intend to dispense with his services."

Dick knew what the captain referred to, the falling of the teacher into his passionate fit on the floor, but he said nothing on that point, for in a way he felt sorry for one who could control himself so little.

"I am glad we won't have to put up with him, sir, any longer. In one way, he is worse than Mr. Crabtree was."

"Let us drop the whole subject, Richard. I have not been satisfied with Mr. Grinder for some time past, and had in view a teacher to take his place before this happened. The new teacher will come after the holidays, and I feel certain all the students will like him fully as much as they like Mr. Strong."

"We won't ask for anybody better than Mr. Strong—or yourself," answered Dick, with a smile.

A talk lasting quarter of an hour followed, and it was decided that Dick should return to the Stanhope cottage, to tell Tom and Sam what turn affairs had taken. Then Tom was to come to the Hall, leaving Dick to look after Sam.

It was nightfall before Dick got back to the cottage. Of course his brothers and the others listened to his story with interest. Both Sam and Tom felt greatly relieved.

"If Grinder keeps on he'll kill himself in one of his fits," said Sam. "I hope he leaves before I go back to school."

"If I was you, I wouldn't go back until he does leave," said Tom. "I'm sure Mrs. Stanhope will let you stay here; won't you?"

"To be sure, Tom," answered the lady of the cottage. "But now Captain Putnam has made up his mind, you may be sure Mr. Grinder will not remain at the Hall many days."

"Perhaps he'll go to-night," said Dora. "The captain surely wont wish him at the Hall over Sunday."

Tom remained with his brothers until evening; then started for the Hall on foot, not caring to bother with a horse. The road was now well broken, so he had no trouble in making the journey.

When he arrived at the Academy he found the boys assembled in the classroom, in charge of one of the under-teachers.

"You cannot see Captain Putnam at present," said the teacher. "You will have to remain here with the other pupils until he is at leisure."

"Something must be wrong," murmured Tom, as he slipped in a seat next to George Granbury.

"I think the captain is getting rid of old Grinder," was the whispered reply. "He's afraid we'd go out and give him three groans when he left."

"I see. Well, it's best to let him go quietly. Good riddance to him."

"That's what all the boys say, although some are sorry he had the fit."

"So am I sorry; but he brought it on himself."

Presently there was loud knocking in the front of the building and the slamming of a door. Then a trunk was dumped into the captain's cutter, and the horse started off, carrying Peleg Snuggers and Jasper Grinder behind him.

When the captain came into the classroom he was pale, and pulled nervously on his mustache Evidently his task of getting rid of the passionate teacher had not been a light one. He said but little, and shortly after the boys were dismissed and sent to bed.

Sunday continued bright and clear, but it was so bitter cold that but few of the students went to church and Sunday school. Tom was anxious to hear how Sam was getting along, and in the afternoon Captain Putnam himself drove him to the Stanhope cottage in the cutter.

It was found that the youngest Rover was feeling much better, although his hoarseness had not left him. He said he was sure he could go back to school the next day.

"We had a visit from Jasper Grinder," said Dick. "He insisted on stopping here in spite of all Snuggers could do to stop him."

"And what did he say?" asked the captain anxiously.

"Oh, he was in a terrible rage, and threatened to sue my father because, as he put it, we had driven him from earning a good living. I could hardly get him out of the house, and when he left he picked up a big chunk of ice and snow and hurled it through the sitting-room window at Sam. I believe the man isn't quite right in his head."

"It certainly looks like it," was the captain's grave response.

"Did Snuggers leave him in Cedarville?"

"Yes. But Snuggers didn't know where he went after that, excepting that he called at the post office for some letters."

"I hope I never have anything to do with him again," said Sam, with a shiver.

"I do not believe he will bother you in the future," returned the captain. "When he comes to his sober senses he will realize fully how foolishly he has acted."

As Sam was so much better and needed no care that Mrs. Stanhope and Dora were not willing to give him, Tom returned to the Hall with Dick and Captain Putnam, after supper at the widow's cottage. The sleigh ride to the school was delightful, for the road was now in excellent shape, while overhead the stars shone down like so many glittering diamonds.

CHAPTER IX.

A RACE ON THE ICE, AND WHAT FOLLOWED.

After the events just narrated several days passed quietly enough at Putnam Hall. In the meantime the weather continued clear, and the boys took it upon themselves to clear off a part of the lake for skating. Then, one night came a strong wind, and the next morning they found a space of cleared ice nearly half a mile long.

"Now for some fine skating!" exclaimed Tom, as he rushed back to the Hall after an inspection of the lake's smooth surface. "We can have all the racing we wish."

"It's a pity Sam can't go out yet," returned Dick. Sam was back to the school, but his cold had not entirely left him.

"Never mind; here are several new magazines he can read," returned Tom, who had been to town with Snuggers on an errand and had purchased them at the stationery store.

"I would just as soon read now," said Sam. "The magazines look mighty interesting."

Just then Fred Garrison came in, accompanied by George Granbury. They had been down to Cedarville to purchase some skates and a new pair of shoes for George.

"Hullo, what do you think we saw in Cedarville!" cried Fred, as soon as he caught sight of the Rovers.

"Lots of snow," suggested Tom dryly.

"Yes—and more."

"A mighty dull town," suggested Sam.

"We saw Dan Baxter."

"What was he doing?"

"He was walking down the street. And who do you suppose was with him? Mr. Grinder!"

"Grinder!" came simultaneously from Tom and Dick.

"Yes, Grinder. And they seemed to be on good terms with each other," put in George.

"I could hardly believe my eyes at first," went on Fred. "But there they were, as plain as day."

"It's very odd," mused Dick. "What should bring them together?"

Nobody could answer that question.

"I don't believe they are up to any good," said Tom.

"I hope Grinder doesn't join hands with Baxter in plotting against us," came from Dick.

The matter was talked over for some time, but no satisfactory conclusion could be reached, and presently the boys separated, some to go skating and others to attend to their studies for the morrow.

Down at the lake the scene was an animated one. Boys were flying in every direction, and mingled with them were a dozen or more girls and a few grown persons. George Strong, the head teacher, was there, enjoying himself fully as much as the pupils who loved him.

"I'll race you, Mr. Strong!" sang out one of the older boys, Tom Mardell.

"Done, Master Mardell," was the teacher's answer. "To yonder rock and return." And in a moment more the pair were off.

"Hurrah! A race between Mr. Strong and Tom Mardell!" came in a shout from a number of the students, and soon there was a general "lining up" to see how it would terminate.

"Go in, Tom!" shouted Tom Rover. "Don't let him beat you!"

"Mr. Strong is behind!" came presently. "Tom is going to win out, sure!"

On and on went the skaters, until the rock was gained. Then Tom Mardell turned so suddenly that he ran full tilt into the teacher with whom he was racing. Both spun around and came down on the ice with a crash.

"Oh!" gasped Mardell. "I didn't mean to do that!"

"I—I know you didn't!" panted Mr. Strong. "You have finished the race in fine shape, I must declare!" And then he arose slowly to his feet and Mardell followed. But nobody was seriously hurt, and in a moment more both skated off hand in hand.

Dick was looking for Dora Stanhope, and presently she appeared, in a pretty fur coat and a jaunty fur cap. He put on her skates for her, and they skated off, with many a side wink from some of the boys.

"Dick's head over heels," said one lad, to Tom.

"Well, I guess you'd be, too, Urner, if you could get such a nice girl to notice you," returned Tom dryly. And then he added: "You must remember we are all old friends."

"Oh, I know that; and I was only joking."

A grand race, open to all comers, had been arranged by the students of the Hall and of Pornell Academy, a rival institute of learning, which has already figured in other volumes of this series. The Pornell boys were out in force, and they were sure that one of their number would win the silver napkin ring, which was the first prize, and another the story book, which constituted the second prize.

Of this race a gentleman from Cedarville, named Mr. Richards, was to be the starter and judge. The course was a short mile, down the lake and back again. The Pornell boys to enter were named Gray, Wardham, Gussy, and De Long. The contestants from Putnam Hall were Tom Rover, Fred Garrison, Tubbs, and a lad named Hollbrook.

"Are you ready?" asked Mr. Richards, after lining the boys up and telling them of the conditions of the race.

There was a dead silence.

"Go!" shouted the starter.

Away went the eight skaters, side by side each striking out bravely. Fred was in the lead, with two Pornell boys a close second, while Tom Rover was fourth.

"Go in, Tom, you must win!" sang out Dick excitedly.

"Hurrah for Tubby!" came from several others. "He's crawling up!"

"Go in, Gray!" came in a shout from some Pornell sympathizers. Gray was one of the pair striving for second place. Now he shot ahead, and in a second more was close upon Fred Garrison's heels.

The pace was truly terrific from the very start, and long before the turn was gained De Long and Hollbrook dropped out, satisfied that they could not win.

Gray, the leader of the Pornell contingent, was a tall, lanky, and powerful fellow, and every stroke he took told well in his favor. The turning point was hardly rounded when he began to crawl up to Fred, and then he gradually passed him.

"Hurrah! Gray is ahead!" shouted his friends.

"Here is where Pornell wins the race!" added one enthusiastic sympathizer.

Fred's pace had been too sharp from the very start, and now he slowly but surely dropped back to second place, and then to third.

But then Tom Rover began to crawl up. He had held himself slightly in reserve. Now he "let himself out." Whiz! whiz! went the polished pair of steels under him, and soon Wardham, the fellow who had held second place, was passed, dropping behind Fred, thus taking fourth place. Then Tom came up on Gray's heels.

"Hurrah for Tom Rover!"

"Go it, Tom, don't let him beat you!"

"Go it Gray, Tom Rover is at your heels!"

Gray did not dare to look back, but at the latter cry he did his best to increase his speed. So did Tom, and while the finishing line was still a hundred yards distant he came up side by side with Gray.

"It's a tie!"

"No, Gray is a little ahead yet!"

"Go in, Gray, don't let him beat you!"

"Tom Rover to the front! Go it, Tom, for the glory of old Putnam Hall!"

A wild yelling broke out on every side. On and on went the two boys, with Fred Garrison not two yards behind them. That the finish would be a close one there was no question. The line was but a hundred feet away; now but seventy-five; now but fifty. Still the leaders kept side by side, neither gaining an inch. Surely it would be a tie. The yelling increased until the noise was deafening.

And then of a sudden Tom Rover shot ahead. How it was done nobody knew, and Tom himself couldn't explain it when asked afterward. But ahead he went, like an arrow shot from a bow, and crossed the line six feet in advance of Gray.

"Hurrah! Tom Rover has won!"

"Told you Tom would do it!"

"Three cheers for Putnam Hall!"

"And Fred Garrison came in only one yard behind Gray, too, and Tubby is a pretty good fourth."

"This is Putnam Hall day, thank you!"

The cheering increased, and Tom was immediately surrounded by a host of admirers.

Gray felt very sore, and wanted to leave the pond at once, but before he could do so Tom skated up to him and held out his hand.

"You came pretty close to beating me," he said. "I can't really say how I got ahead at the finish."

"I—I guess my skate slipped, or something," stammered Gray, and shook hands. Tom's candor took away the keen edge of the defeat.

The Putnam Hall boys were wild with delight, and insisted upon carrying Tom on their shoulders around the pond. A great crowd followed, and nobody noticed how this made the ice bend and crack.

"Be careful there!" shouted Mr. Strong warningly. "There are too many of you in a bunch!" But ere he had finished the sentence there came another loud cracking, and in a twinkle a section of the ice went down, plunging fully a dozen lads into the icy water below.

CHAPTER X.

THE END OF THE TERM.

"The ice has gone down!"

"Some of the boys will be drowned!"

"Get some boards and a rope, quick!"

These and a score of other cries rang out. In the meantime those near to the hole skated with all speed to one place of safety or another.

Some of the imperiled boys who had not gone down very deeply managed to scramble out with wet feet or wet lower limbs only, but when the crowd had drawn back it was seen that three boys were floundering in the chilling water over their heads. These boys were George Granbury and Frank Harrington, who had been supporting Tom on their shoulders, and Tom himself, who had been dropped into the opening head first by the frightened lads.

Realizing that something must be done at once, Mr. Strong ran to the boathouse, which was close at hand, and soon reappeared, carrying a long plank. He was followed by a boy with a rope, and several boys brought more planks and more ropes.

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Rover Boys in the Mountains

When the first plank was pushed out Tom lost no time in grasping hold of it. He crawled to a safe place on hands and knees, but was so nearly paralyzed he could not stand up.

"I'll carry him up to the Hall," said Peleg Snuggers, who had chanced upon the scene, and without ceremony he picked Tom up in his strong arms and made off for the school building on a run.

After Tom came Frank Harrington, who caught hold of one end of a rope tossed toward the hole. As soon as he shouted he had the rope secure, a dozen boys pulled upon it, and Frank was literally dragged from his icy bath. Once on shore he was started on a run for the Hall, some boys rushing ahead to obtain dry clothing for both him and the others.

Poor George Granbury was now the only one left in danger, and matters appeared to be going hard with him. He clutched at one of the planks thrust toward him, but his hold slipped and down he went out of sight.

"He'll be drowned! He's too cold to save himself!" was the cry of several who were watching him.

"Be careful, boys!" came warningly from Mr. Strong. "Be careful, or somebody else will get in!"

"Mr. Strong, if you will hold the plank, I'll crawl out and get hold of Granbury," came from Dick, in a determined voice.

"Rover, can you do it?"

"I feel certain I can. Hold tight, please."

Dick leaped upon the plank and threw himself flat. Then he crawled out as fast as he could, until he was on the end over the open water. Holding to the plank with one hand he reached out to grasp George's shoulder with the other.

"Sa—save me!" gasped the drowning boy.

"Give me your hand, George," called Dick.

Granbury tried to do so, but the effort was a failure, for the cold had so numbed him he could scarcely move. Reaching as far as he could, Dick caught a portion of his coat and drew the helpless boy toward him.

The ice cracked ominously, but did not break. Mr. Strong warned the others still further back.

Slowly but surely Dick raised George to a level of the plank. Then with an extra effort he hauled the half-drowned boy up.

"Now haul in on the plank," he called, and Mr. Strong and two boys did so immediately. In a moment more danger from drowning was a thing of the past for George Granbury.

A cheer went up because of Dick's heroic action, but this was instantly hushed as George was seen to stagger back and fall as if dead. Instantly Mr. Strong picked the boy up in his arms and ran toward the Hall.

"Oh, Dick, how noble of you!" It was Dora Stanhope who spoke, as she came up and placed a trembling little hand on his arm. "And how glad I am that you didn't get in while doing it." And her eyes filled with tears.

"I—I'm glad too, Dora," he said brokenly. And then added: "Excuse me, but I guess I'd better go up and see how Tom is making out."

"To be sure, and let me know if it's all right," she replied.

Once inside the Hall Dick learned that Tom had been put into a warm bed. He was apparently none the worse for his mishap, and likely to be as full of life and fun as ever on the morrow.

Poor Granbury, however, was not so well off. It took some time to restore him to consciousness, and while Captain Putnam and Mr. Strong put him to bed, with hot-water bags to warm him up, Peleg Snuggers was sent off post-haste for a doctor. As a result of the adventure Granbury had to remain in bed for the best part of a week.

"I shan't forget you for what you did," he said to Dick, when able to sit up. "You saved my life." And many agreed that what George Granbury said was true. As for Dora Stanhope, she looked upon the elder Rover as more of a hero than ever.

After the mishap at the races on the ice the time flew by swiftly until the Christmas holidays. Before going home for Christmas Dick called upon the Stanhopes and gave them the gifts he had purchased, over which they were much pleased. For Dick Dora had worked a pretty scarf, of which he was justly proud. Mrs. Stanhope had books for all the boys, something which was always to their liking. The Rovers did not forget the Lanings, nor were they forgotten by these old friends.

"And now for home. Hurrah!" shouted Sam, on the way to Cedarville. "I must say I'm just a bit anxious to see the old place once more."

"Yes, and see father, and Uncle Randolph and Aunt Martha," put in Dick.

"Don't forget Alexander Pop," put in Tom, referring to the colored man who had once been a waiter at the Hall, and who was now in the Rover employ.

"And Jack Ness and the rest," put in Sam. "I guess we'll be glad enough to see everybody."

When the boys arrived at Ithaca they found there had been a freight smash-up on the railroad, and that they would have to wait for five or six hours for a

train to take them home. This would bring them to Oak Run, their railroad station, at three o'clock in the morning.

"I move we stay in Ithaca over night," said Tom. "If we got to Oak Run at three in the morning, what would we do? There would be no one there to meet us, and it's a beastly hour for rousing anybody out."

So they decided to put up at a hotel in Ithaca, and went around to a new place called the Students' Rest. The hotel was fairly well filled, but they secured a large apartment with two double beds.

"There's a nice concert on this evening by a college glee club," said Sam. "I move we get tickets and go."

"Second the motion," said Tom promptly.

"The motion is put and carried," put in Dick just as promptly. "I trust, though, the concert don't make us weep."

"They won't know we're there, so perhaps they won't try it on too hard," said Sam, and there the students' slang came to an end for the time being.

The concert was quite to their taste, and they were surprised, when it was over, to learn that it was after eleven o'clock.

"I hadn't any idea it was so late," exclaimed Dick. "We'd better be getting back to the hotel, or we won't get our money's worth out of that room."

"That's right," laughed Tom. "Although, to tell the truth, I'm not very sleepy."

Several blocks were covered when Sam, who was looking across the street, uttered a cry of astonishment.

"Look!" he exclaimed.

"At what?" asked both Tom and Dick.

"Over in front of that clothing store. There is Dan Baxter, and Jasper Grinder is with him!"

"Sam is right," came from Dick. "They must have struck up some sort of a friendship, or they wouldn't be here together."

"Let's go over and see what Baxter has to say for himself," said Tom boldly.

"All right," returned Dick. "But we want to keep out of a row; remember that."

They crossed the street and walked straight up to Baxter and Jasper Grinder, who were holding an animated conversation in the doorway of a clothing establishment which was closed for the night.

As they came up, Sam caught the words, "There is money there, sure," coming from Baxter. He paid no attention to the words at the time, but remembered them long afterward, and with good reason.

"Hullo, Baxter!" said Dick, halting in front of the bully.

Dan Baxter gave a start, as if detected in some wrong act. Then, as the light from an electric lamp shone upon Dick's face, he glared sourly at the oldest Rover.

"Where did you come from?" he asked, and then, seeing the other Rovers, added: "Been following me, I suppose?"

"No, we haven't been following you," said Dick. "We just came from, the college boys' concert in the hall down the street."

Jasper Grinder looked as sour as did Dan Baxter. Then he shook his finger in Dick's face.

"I haven't forgotten you, Richard Rover," he said bitterly. "And I am not likely to forget you."

"As you please, Mr. Grinder," was the cool rejoinder.

"And I shan't forget you, Jasper Grinder," put in Sam. "You were the means of my going to bed with a heavy cold."

"Bah! it was all put on," exclaimed Jasper Grinder. "Had I had my way, I would have kept you in the storeroom all night, and flogged you beside."

"Captain Putnam did a good thing when he dismissed you," put in Tom. "It's a pity he ever took on such a cold-hearted and miserly fellow."

"You Rovers think you are on top," said Dan Baxter savagely. "But you won't stay on top long, I'll give you my word on that."

"What are you going to do about it?" asked Dick, not without considerable curiosity.

"Never mind; you'll learn when the proper time comes."

"Is your dad going to try to break jail again?" asked Sam.

"It's none of your business what he does—or what I do, either."

"We'll make it our business if you try any of your games on us again," said Dick. "We've stood enough from you and your kind, and we don't intend to stand any more."

"Are you going back to school after the holidays?" asked Dan Baxter, after a pause.

"That's our business," answered Tom.

"All right; you needn't answer the question if you don't want to."

"What do you want to know for?" asked Sam.

"Oh! nothing in particular. I suppose it's a good place for you to go to. You are all Captain Putnam's pets, and he won't make you do a thing you don't like, or make you study either, if your father shells out to him."

"We study a great deal more than you ever studied, Baxter," said Dick.

"Let them go," cried Jasper Grinder, in deep irritation. "I want nothing to do with them," and he turned his back on the Rovers.

"We're willing to go," said Dick. "But, Baxter, I warn you against doing anything in the future. You'll only put your foot into it."

So speaking, Dick walked away, and Tom and Sam followed him. Baxter shook his fist at them, and Jasper Grinder did the same.

"They're a bad team," said Tom, as they walked to the hotel. "If they try, perhaps they can give us lots of trouble."

CHAPTER XI.

HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS.

"Hurrah! Here we are again! How natural Oak Run looks!" exclaimed Tom on the following day, as the long train came to a halt at their station and they piled out on to the narrow platform.

"There is old Nat Ricks, the station master," said Sam. "Remember how you nearly scared him to death once by putting a big fire-cracker in the waste paper he was burning and then telling him a yarn about dynamite being around?"

"Well, I just guess I do," answered Tom, with a grin. "Hullo, Mr. Ricks!" he called out. "How are you this fine and frosty morning?"

"Putty well, Tom," grumbled the old station master. "Been troubled a lot lately with rheumatism."

"That's too bad, Mr. Ricks. Caught it hoisting trunks into the cars, I suppose."

"Don't know how I caught it."

"Or maybe lifting milk cans."

"I don't lift no milk cans no more. Job Todder has that work around here."

"I see. Well, you must have caught it somehow, or else it caught you. Ever tried the old Indian remedy for it?"

"Indian remedy, what's that?"

"Gracious, Mr. Ricks! never heard of the old reliable Indian remedy? I'm astonished at you," went on Tom, in mock candor.

"I've heard tell of Indian vegetable pills—but they aint no good for rheumatism," was the slow answer.

"Where is the pain mostly?"

"Down this left leg."

"Then the Indian remedy will just cure you, sure pop, Mr. Ricks."

"Well, what might it be?"

"It might be cover-liver oil, but it isn't. You get a quart bottle—a red quart bottle, for a white one won't do,—and fill it with cold spring water, tapped when the moon is full."

"Is that all?"

"Oh, no, no! Then you take the spring water and boil it over a charcoal fire, same as the Modoc Indians used to do. You remember all about that, don't you?"

"I—I—'pears to me I ought to," stammered the old station master.

"Well, after the water is boiled," went on Tom, with a side wink at Dick and Sam, who were already on a broad grin, "you strain it through a piece of red cheesecloth—not white, remember—and add one teaspoonful of sugar, one of salt, one of ginger, one of mustard, one of hog's lard, one of mercury, one of arrowroot, one of kerosene oil, one of lemon juice, one of extract of vanilla, one of mushamusha——"

"Hold on Rover, I can't remember all that. I'll have to put it down," interrupted Nat Ricks.

"No, you don't put it down until everything is in and well mixed. Then you put it down, half a pint at a time, four times a day. It's a sure cure, and inside of a week after taking seventeen quarts and rubbing the empty bottles on your left shoulder blade you'll feel like dancing a jig of joy; really, you will."

"Oh, you go along!" growled the old station master, in sudden wrath. "You're joking me. Go oh, or I'll throw something at you!"

"No bouquets, please, Mr. Ricks. Then you won't try the cure? All right, but don't blame me if your rheumatism gets worse. And as I can't do anything for you, will you kindly inform me if you've seen anything of Jack Ness around here, with our turnout?"

"If you want your hired man you go find him yourself," growled the station master, and hobbled into his office.

"Oh, Tom, but that was rich," laughed Sam softly. "When you said extract of vanilla and mushamusha I thought I'd explode. And he was listening so earnestly, too!"

"Here's Jack Ness!" cried Dick, as they turned to the rear of the station. "Hullo, Jack! Here we are again!"

"Master Dick!" exclaimed the hired man, with a grin. "An' Tom an' Sam! Glad to see you boys back, indeed I am. Here, give me them bags. I'll put 'em in the back of the sleigh."

"How is the sleighing?" asked Sam.

"Sleighing is quite fair yet, Master Tom. In you go. All the folks is dying to see you."

They were soon stowed away in the big family sleigh, and Jack Ness touched up the team, and away they went, through Oak Run and across the bridge spanning the Swift River—that stream where Sam had once had such a thrilling adventure. The countryside was covered with snow and with pools of ice.

It did not take them long to come in sight of Valley Brook. While still at a distance they saw faithful Alexander Pop come out on the broad piazza and wave his hand at them.

"There's Aleck!" cried Tom. "He's been on the watch!"

"There is father!" came from Sam, a moment later; "and aunt Martha and Uncle Randolph!"

Soon they turned into the lane, and Jack Ness brought the sleigh up to the piazza block in fine style. Tom was the first out and ran to greet his father, and then his uncle and his aunt, and the others followed.

"I am glad to see you back, boys," said Mr. Anderson Rover. "You all look first-rate."

"We're feeling first-rate," came from Dick.

"Are you sure, Sam, that you are quite over your cold?" asked Aunt Martha anxiously.

"Quite sure, aunty dear," he answered, and kissed her very warmly, not once, but several times.

"Here, don't eat Aunt Martha up!" cried Tom. "Leave some for me."

"You dear Tom!" murmured the lady of the house, as she kissed him and then embraced Dick. "Full of fun as ever, I suppose."

"Oh, no, aunty! I never do anything wrong now," answered Tom solemnly. "I really haven't time, you know."

"I'm afraid, Tom, I can't trust you." And Mrs. Randolph Rover shook her head sadly, but smiled nevertheless. She loved the jolly lad with all her heart.

There was a warm greeting from Randolph Rover also, and then the boys turned indoors, to greet faithful Alexander Pop and the others who worked about the place.

"Yo' is a sight fo' soah eyes, 'deed yo' is, boys," said the colored man. "I can't tell yo' how much I'se missed yo'!" And his face shone like a piece of polished ebony.

"It's more like home than ever, to get where you are, Aleck," said Dick. "You've been through so much with us you are certainly part of the outfit." And at this Aleck laughed and looked more pleased than ever.

It was the day before Christmas, but in honor of their arrival there was an extra-fine dinner awaiting them. Mrs. Rover had wanted to keep her turkey meat for Christmas, so her husband, Anderson Rover, and Aleck had gone into the woods back of the farm and brought down some rabbits and a number of birds, so there was potpie and other good things galore, not forgetting some pumpkin pies and home-made doughnuts, which Aunt Martha prepared with her own hands and of which the boys had always been exceedingly fond.

"I'll tell you what," remarked Tom, as he was stowing away his second generous piece of pie, "the feed at the Hall is all right, but when it comes to a

real, downright spread, like this, the palm goes to Aunt Martha." And Dick and Sam agreed with him.

There was, of course, much to tell about on both sides, and after dinner the family gathered in the big sitting room, in front of a cheerful, blazing fire. Mr. Anderson Rover listened with keen interest to what his sons had to say about Jasper Grinder and Dan Baxter.

"I sincerely trust they do not plot against us," he said. "I am getting old, and I want no more trouble."

"I don't believe Dan has the backbone his father has," answered Dick. "And I believe Mr. Grinder is good deal of a coward."

"If only young Baxter would turn over a new leaf!" sighed Mrs. Martha Rover. "I declare I'll not feel safe, on your account, until that young man is taken care of."

The evening was passed in talking, singing, and playing games, and it was not until late that all retired.

The Christmas to follow was not one to be easily forgotten. There were presents for everybody, from Mr. Rover down to Sarah, the hired girl, and everybody was greatly pleased.

At the Christmas dinner Alexander Pop insisted upon waiting on the table, just as he had so often done at Putnam Hall. He had on his full dress suit, and his face wore one perpetual smile. The boys had all remembered Aleck handsomely, and he had not forgotten them.

In the afternoon the boys went skating, and on the pond met several of the boys of the neighborhood, and all had a glorious time until dark. Then they piled home, once more as hungry as wolves, to a hot supper, and an evening of nut-cracking around the fire.

"Tell you what," said Sam on going to bed that night, "I almost wish Christmas came once a week instead of once a year!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE BRASS-LINED MONEY CASKET.

It was on the day following Christmas that Dick brought out the brass-lined money casket which he had picked up in the cave on Needle Point Island, in Lake Huron, as related in a previous volume of this series.

As old readers know, this cave was stumbled upon by accident. It had once been the hiding place of a band of smugglers who plied their unlawful calling between the United States and Canada, and the cave was found filled with numerous articles of more or less value. The Rovers had gone back for these things, but had found some money gone, also a curiously shaped dagger and a map, which had been in the cave on a rude table. They were pretty well satisfied in their minds that Dan Baxter had taken these things, but had never been able to prove it.

The brass-lined money casket was an odd-looking affair, which Dick found thrust in a big box of fancy articles of various descriptions. The box was about a foot long, six inches wide, and six inches deep. It was of rosewood, with silver corners, and the lining was of polished brass, curiously engraved. The box had contained a few odd Canadian silver coins, but that was all.

"Do you know, I would like to know the history of this box," observed Dick, as he looked it over. "As it belonged to one of those smugglers it ought to have quite a story to tell."

"It will make a nice jewel casket," put in Tom. "When you settle down with Dora, you can give if to her for her dia——"

"Oh, stow that, Tom! If Dora ever does take me for a husband, it won't be for some years to come, you must know that."

"Let me take a look at the box," put in Sam. "I never got the chance to look it over carefully."

"It's odd that they should engrave it inside," went on Dick. "Especially since the outside silver corners are plain."

"Perhaps there is a secret spring hidden by the engraving," suggested Tom. "Hunt around. It may fly apart and let out a hundred thousand in diamonds."

"Don't be foolish, Tom," said Dick. "It isn't likely there is a spring."

"But there just is a spring!" exclaimed Sam, who was handling the box. "Hark!"

He ran his finger nail over a spot on one side of the box, and there followed a tiny click. Then he ran his finger nail back, and there was another click.

"Hurrah! Sam has solved the mystery of the sphinx!" cried Tom. "Can you open it? I claim a third share of the diamonds!"

"Give me the box," said Dick, also a bit excited. When he got it in his hands he, too, ran his finger nail over the engraved brass. Several tiny clicks followed.

"There must be some opening beneath the brass lining," he said.

"Take it to the window, and perhaps you'll be able to see something more," suggested Sam.

Dick did as advised, and, with his brothers gathered close beside him, worked over the money casket for fully quarter of an hour.

"It seems to click, and that's all," he said disappointedly. "If I could only——Oh!"

Dick stopped short. His finger had run across the lining in a certain way. There were three clicks in rapid succession, and on the instant one of the brass plates of the box flew back, revealing a tiny compartment behind it, not over a quarter of an inch in depth.

"No diamonds there," said Tom, his face falling. "Full of emptiness."

"No, here is a sheet of parchment," returned Dick, pulling it forth. "A map!" he added, as he unfolded it. "Well, I never!"

"Never what?" came from Tom and Sam.

"Unless I am mistaken, this is like the map that was on that table in the cave, only this is much smaller."

"That's interesting, too," said Tom.

"The back of the map is full of writing," said Sam. He looked closer. "It's in French."

"This box must have belonged to one of those French-Canadian smugglers," said Dick. "We'll have to get Uncle Randolph to read the writing and tell us what it says."

The three boys had been up to Dick's room. Now they lost no time in going below. In all eagerness they burst into the library, where Anderson Rover sat reading a magazine and Randolph Rover one of his favorite works on scientific farming.

"Dick has got the money casket open!" cried Sam.

"And he has found a map," added Tom. "We want Uncle Randolph to read the writing. It's in French."

"Found a map in that old brass-lined box, eh?" said Anderson Rover. "That's interesting."

"I am afraid my French is a trifle rusty," remarked Randolph Rover, as he put down his book. "Let me see the map."

He took it to the window, and both he and Anderson Rover looked it over with keen interest.

"Why, this is a map of the locality around Timber Run," said Randolph Rover. "That's a great lumbering section in the Adirondacks."

"Timber Run!" echoed Tom, and for the moment said no more. But he remembered what Dora Stanhope had said, that after the holidays Nellie and Grace Laning were going on a visit to an aunt who lived at Timber Run.

"Yes, Thomas, this is a map of Timber Run. This stream is the Perch River, and this is Bear Pond. The naming is in French, but that is the English of it."

"Please read the writing on the back," said Dick. "If the map is worth anything I want to know it."

Without further ado Randolph Rover began to read the writing. It was a hard and tedious task, and the translating was, to him, equally difficult, for his knowledge of French was somewhat limited. Translated, the writing ran somewhat after this fashion:

"To find the box of silver and gold, go to where Bear Pond empties into Perch River. Ten paces to the west is a large pine tree, which was once struck by lightning. Go due southwest from the pine tree sixty-two paces, to the flat rock, behind which is a sharp-pointed rock. Beneath the sharp-pointed rock is the chamber with the box. Stranger, beware of Goupert's ghost."

"A treasure in the mountains!" cried Sam. "Hurrah! let's go and get it!"

"Bear Pond lies between two high mountains," said Randolph Rover. "It is in a very wild country, and so far but little of the timber has been taken out."

"Never mind, we'll go anyhow!" put in Tom enthusiastically. "Why, the box may be worth a fortune!"

"Yes, let us go by all means," put in Dick. "I wouldn't like any better fun than hunting for a treasure box."

"Haven't you boys had adventures enough?" questioned Anderson Rover. "You've been to Africa and out West, and on the ocean and the Great Lakes ——"

"Oh, this would just be a little winter's outing in the mountains," said Tom. "We could go hunting, and have lots of fun, even if we didn't find the treasure box."

"The treasure box was probably taken away years ago," said Randolph Rover. "Most likely several of the smugglers knew of it."

"And what of that ghost?" asked Anderson Rover, with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Pooh! we're not afraid of ghosts," sniffed Sam. "Are we, Tom?"

"If I saw a ghost, I'd be apt to pepper him with shot, if I had my gun," answered Tom. "No, I'm not afraid of such things—and neither is Dick."

"It would be a fine thing to find a big boxful of silver," said Dick seriously. "I know there was lots in that cave, before Dan Baxter scooped it in. And, by the way, he must have that other map yet."

"Perhaps he went for the treasure box!" burst out Sam.

"If the box is gone, we can't help it," said Tom. "But I move we get to Timber Run and Bear Pond just as soon as possible."

"Do you want to start in this cold weather?" asked his father anxiously.

"Pooh! It isn't so very cold."

"It's a good deal colder up in the mountains than it is here, I can tell you that. Why, you might easily freeze to death if you got lost in the snow."

"I wonder if we couldn't find some guide who knows that territory thoroughly," mused Dick.

"If you could find a good guide, I wouldn't mind your going," said his parent. "But I shall object to your going alone."

"Then we'll hunt for a guide, and without delay," said Dick. "I would like to go up there before Putnam Hall opens again."

"So would I," came from his two brothers.

"I think I know where you can get a guide," said Tom, after a pause. "The Lanings have relatives at Timber Run. Let's write to Mr. Laning."

This was agreed to, and a special trip was made to the village by Aleck Pop to post the letter. In the letter they asked Mr. Laning to telegraph, if possible, in reply.

The telegram came shortly after noon the next day. It ran as follows:

"I feel sure my brother-in-law, John Barrow, of Timber Run, can supply a reliable guide. Will write to him.

"JOHN LANING."

"That settles it," said Dick. "I know the Lanings will do what is right by us, so we may as well get ready to start at once. Are you willing, father?"

"Yes, Dick," was the answer. "But be sure and keep out of danger, and keep Tom and Sam out, too."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HEART OF THE ADIRONDACK.

Three days later found the Rover boys in the heart of the Adirondack Mountains of New York State. They had left home, after a hasty but thorough preparation, two days before, and taken the train from Oak Run to the mountain village of Medwell. At Medwell they had taken the stage to Barton's Corners, and at this point had hired a private conveyance to carry them and their outfit to Timber Run.

At the time of which I write Timber Run was nothing more than a collection of a dozen houses, strung along a branch of the Perch River, where that stream turned the southern slope of a high hill known as Bald Top. There was a general store here and also an office belonging to the Timber Run Lumber Company. But business with the company was slow, and the village, consequently, was almost destitute of life, two of the houses being without tenants.

"Well, this doesn't look much like a place," remarked Sam, as they got out of the heavy lumber wagon which had brought them and their outfit over.

"Phew! but aint it cold!" exclaimed Tom, dancing around and slapping his arms over his chest. "I wonder how Nellie and Grace Laning like this?"

"I'll wager you've been thinking of Nellie all the way up," said Dick slyly, remembering how his brother had tormented him about Dora Stanhope.

"Couldn't think of anything but how cold it was," growled Tom, but his face took on a sudden redness. "Where do you go next?" he demanded, to change the subject.

"Let's go over to the store and ask for Mr. John Barrow," suggested Dick.

The store was at a fork in the roads, and thither they hurried, to get inside, for the ride from Barton's Corners had certainly been a chilling one. In the store they found a big pot stove throwing out a generous amount of heat, and

around this stove were gathered half a dozen men, smoking and telling stories.

"So you are the young men who are looking for John Barrow," said the storekeeper, after listening to what Dick had to say. "He was here waiting for you, and he'll be back in a bit. Rather a cold ride, eh? Draw up to the fire and warm up."

A place was made for the lads, and while they were "thawing out," as Sam put it, John Barrow came in. He proved to be a tall, powerful built lumberman, with a well-tanned face and sharp, but kindly, eyes.

"How do you do," he said, as he shook hands. "Real glad to know you. Yes, I got a letter from John Laning, my brother-in-law, tellin' me all about you. He says as how you want a guide fer these parts. Well, I don't want to brag, but I reckon I know the lay o' the land 'round here about as good as any o' 'em, and a heap sight better nor lots."

"We'd like you first-rate for a guide," said Tom, who was pleased with John Barrow's looks, as were also his brothers. "But can you spare the time?"

"Reckon I can, just now. You see, the lumber company has got in some sort of a tangle with the owner of the timber on this tract, and consequently work is at a standstill. That's why you see so many men hangin' around here."

"Then you work for the company?" asked Dick.

"I do in the winter time, but not in the summer. I've got a tidy farm down the river a bit, and I let out my hosses to the company to haul timber. It's cash money, you see, when the haulin' is goin' on."

"I believe the Laning girls are stopping with you," put in Sam.

"Yes, Nellie and Grace came up some time ago. You see, our girl, Addie, gits tired being on the farm with only her mother, so we invited her cousins to come up for a spell. They've had some pretty good times together, so far, skatin' and sleighin', and the like. They are all anxious to see you."

John Barrow had brought with him his wagon, and into this their outfit was dumped, and a minute later they were off, down the winding and rough road

running along the bank of the river, which was now frozen to a thickness of a foot or more and covered with several inches of snow.

"You say you know this locality," observed Dick, as they bumped along over the frozen ground. "Do you know the spot where Bear Pond empties into Perch River?"

"I know several such spots, my lad."

"Several!" came from all of the Rover boys.

"Yes, several. You see the ground around the pond is marshy, and the heavy rains cut all sorts of gullies here and there, so the pond empties into the river, now, at five or six p'ints."

"Are these points very far apart?" asked Sam, in dismay. "You see, I'm very anxious we should know the exact particulars."

"Indeed!" John Barrow looked at them curiously. "Say, I reckon I know what you are after!" he burst out suddenly.

"What?" came from the three.

"You're on a hunt for old Goupert's treasure."

"Why, what do you know about that?" demanded Dick. He remembered that the writing on the map said, "Beware of Goupert's ghost."

"Oh, that's an old yarn about here, and at different times we've had more'n a hundred folks a-hunting around for that old Frenchman's money box, but nobody ever got so much as a smell o' it."

"Who was Goupert?" asked Tom.

"Goupert was a thoroughly bad man, who lived sixty or seventy years ago. The story goes that he used to be a smuggler and that he came here when the authorities chased him off the Great Lakes. He had lots o' money, but he was a miser, and a queer stick to boot. He built himself a cabin on Bear Pond, and lived there all alone for two years. Then some lake men came down here, and one night there was a big row and the lake men disappeared. Goupert couldn't be found at first, but about a month later some hunters discovered his dead body tied to a tree in the woods, not far from the spot you asked about. He

had been left to starve to death. The story was that the lake men had starved him in order to get him to tell where he had hidden his money box, and that old Goupert was too much o' a miser to let the secret out. So folks begun to hunt for that money box high an' low, but never got a smell o' it, as I said."

"Did you ever hunt for the money?" questioned Dick.

"No, I never had no time to waste. So you really came up on that account?"

"We came up on that account, and also to have a good time in the mountains," said Dick, before Sam or Tom could speak. "But, Mr. Barrow, I wish you wouldn't mention this to the other folks around here. They might laugh at us for coming on what they think is a wild-goose chase."

"Oh, I won't say a word on it—if you want it that way."

"Did this Goupert leave any relatives?" asked Sam.

"No, lad, not a soul."

"Then if we should find that treasure it would belong to us," put in Tom.

"Every penny on it, lad. But don't raise any high hopes, or you may be sorely disapp'inted."

"Oh, I came for a good time," replied Tom, in an off-handed a manner as possible.

Presently John Barrow had to get out of the wagon to fix something on the harness. While he was doing this Dick leaned over to his two brothers.

"Don't say anything about the map to anybody," he whispered. "We'll keep that a secret for the present." And Tom and Sam nodded, to show that they understood.

The ride to John Barrow's house soon came to an end, and as the boys alighted at the horseblock the door opened and Nellie and Grace Laning appeared.

"How do you do, Tom!" cried Nellie, as she ran and caught him by the hand, while Grace did the same to Sam. "We're awfully glad to see you, and to see Dick and Sam, too," and a hand-shaking all around followed. Then Mrs.

Barrow, a motherly woman, was introduced and also her daughter Addie, who was Nellie's age, and full of fun.

"Come right in, boys," said Mrs. Barrow. "Supper is waiting, and I'm sure you must be hungry."

"Hungry doesn't describe it," said Tom. "I could eat sole leather. Phew! what an appetite riding in this mountain air does give a fellow!"

"Can you ever remember the time when you wasn't without an appetite, Tom?" asked Nellie Laning, with a laugh.

"Never go so far into ancient history," he returned solemnly, and a general laugh followed.

Soon their outfit was safely housed in the barn, and then they entered the house, where the long supper table, filled with good things, awaited them. All three of the girls insisted upon waiting on the boys, and it proved as jolly a meal as they had ever eaten. They lingered for an hour at the table, talking and cracking nuts, and during that time the Rover boys became thoroughly acquainted with the Barrow family.

"Oh, I've heard lots about you!" said Addie Barrow. "Nellie has told me great, long stories about Tom's bravery, and Grace has told me all about Sam's doings, and both of them have told about you, Dick——"

"Now, do be still, Addie!" put in Nellie Laning. "I declare, I never said a word!"

"Oh! A word! Why, you kept me awake one night for over an hour telling about how Tom——"

"Let's have a song," broke in Sam. "I see an organ in the next room and some music. You must play," he added, to Addie.

"She plays beautifully," put in Grace, thankful for the change of subject. "Addie, give them that new song, 'I'm Sorry, Oh, So Sorry!'"

"All right," answered the young lady of the house, and sitting down at the organ she ran her hands over the keys and started the song. She could sing

and play well, and all joined in the chorus. The music was kept up for over an hour, and then the Rover boys retired, highly pleased over their reception.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE START UP THE RIVER.

"If it wasn't for finding that treasure box I'd just as lief stay here for a few days," remarked Tom, on getting up the following morning.

"Ditto myself," came from Sam. "We could have a boss good time, eh?"

"How about it if Nellie and Grace weren't here?" came from Dick, and then dodged a shoe thrown at him by Tom and a pillow sent forth by Sam. "No, boys, it won't do—we must leave for the hunt to-day. Why, there may be a million in it."

"That's right, Dick; when you fly, fly high," said Tom. "That Frenchman never had a million. If he had a couple of thousand he'd be lucky."

"And of course, a couple of thousand is of no importance to us," put in Sam grandiloquently.

"All right; I'll go on the hunt alone."

"No, Dick, of course we'll go," said Tom hastily. "When do you want to start?"

"As soon as Mr. Barrow can get off."

But, in spite of Dick's anxiety to get off, the start was delayed for a whole day, much to Tom and Sam's secret joy. John Barrow had to go to Timber Run for things needed in the house by his wife and daughter.

When he returned there was a broad grin on his face.

"I've got news for you," he said to Dick, who had followed him down to the barn. "There's another party arrived at Timber Run on the hunt fer that treasure of old Goupert's."

"Another party. Who is it?"

"Didn't hear their names. There are two men and a young fellow o' nineteen or twenty. They have hired Bill Harney fer a guide, and are goin' to strike out fer the Pond to-morrow."

"Two men and a young fellow," mused Dick. "I'd like to know who they are."

"One o' the men looked like a preacher or schoolmaster. He called the young feller Thacher, or something like that."

"It wasn't Baxter?" queried Dick, struck by a sudden idea.

"That's the name—now I remember."

"And the man, did they call him Grinder—Jasper Grinder?" went on Dick excitedly.

"If it wasn't Grinder, it was something like it. The party came east from Ithaca."

"It's Dan Baxter and Jasper Grinder sure!" burst out Dick. "Well, this beats the nation."

"Then you know the crowd?"

"I do—to my sorrow, Mr. Barrow. That Dan Baxter is the good-for-nothing young fellow I told you of this morning, and Jasper Grinder was a teacher at the Hall. We had a big row with him and he was kicked out in a hurry by Captain Putnam. They are our enemies."

"Humph! That promises to make it interesting for you. But it's queer they should come up at the same time you're here," went on the lumberman thoughtfully.

"I might as well let you into a secret, Mr. Barrow. Will you promise to keep it entirely to yourself?"

"Certainly, lad, if it's an honest secret."

"It is honest," answered Dick, and thereupon told of the adventure on Needle Point Island and of the map on the table, and how it had disappeared, and of the finding of the second map in the brass-lined money casket later on.

"I am sure Dan Baxter has that other map," he concluded. "He wants that treasure as badly as we do."

"Then I allow as how it will be a nip-an'-tuck race between you," returned John Barrow. "The fust to get there will be the best man. O' course, with that map it ought to be plain enough sailin'."

"I thought it would be, but it will mix us up, now you say that Bear Pond empties into Perch River in several places. We'll have to try one place after another."

"Do your directions start from that p'int?"

"Yes."

"Then we'll have to find the right emptyin' place, that's all. My advice is to start fer the spot to-morrow early."

So it was arranged, and Dick called Tom and Sam down to the barn to talk it over. It was late in the afternoon, and all worked until after the supper hour in preparing for the start.

"It's a good twenty miles' tramp from here," said John Barrow, "and we'll have to climb two pretty steep mountains to get to the spot."

"Why can't we follow the stream up?" asked Tom. "That would be easier than tramping up the mountains."

"By the river the way is at least forty miles, and there are half a dozen rough spots where you'd have to walk a mile or two."

"We have our skates," said Sam. "Skating would be easier than walking, and pulling the sleds on the ice would be child's play."

"Well, I allow as how I wouldn't mind skatin' myself," said John Barrow thoughtfully. "I never thought of that before. If you want to, we can try that trail. We can take to the mountain any time, if we find skating no good."

So it was arranged that they should strike out for Bear Pond by way of the river, and the sleds, of which there were two, were packed accordingly, and the boys saw to it that their skates were well sharpened and otherwise in good condition.

"When you're skating, you want to look out for air holes," was John Barrow's caution. "Fer where the river runs between the mountains it is mighty deep in spots, I can tell you that!"

"Thanks, I'll be on my guard," answered Tom, with a shiver. "I've had all I want of icy baths this winter."

The girls were sorry to see the boys leave so quickly, but were consoled when Tom promised to stay longer on the return. On the following morning breakfast was had at six o'clock, and by seven they were off, everybody wishing them a good time. Only Mrs. Barrow knew that the boys were on a treasure, and not a bird and wild animal, hunt.

It was a clear, frosty day and everybody was in the best of spirits. The boys wore fur caps and warm clothing, and each was provided with either a rifle or a shot-gun. So far they had seen but little game around the farm, but John Barrow assured them that the timber and mountains were full of game of all sorts.

"I wonder what route Dan Baxter's party took," said Dick, as they gained the river, and stopped to put on their skates.

"I didn't hear what route they took," answered their guide. "I reckon they went straight over the mountains. I don't believe as how Bill Harney takes to skating."

"Is this Bill Harney a good sort?" asked Tom. "If he is, I can tell you he has got into bad company."

"Bill isn't so bad when he's sober. It's when he gits full o' rum that he makes things lively. He's a great drinker."

They were soon on the river, which at this point was fifty to sixty feet wide. The snow covered a large portion of the surface, but the wind had cleared many a long stretch, and they skated on these, dragging the sleds behind them. Each sled was packed high with the camping outfit, but they ran along readily.

"I wonder how long we'll be out," said Sam, as he skated by Tom's side.

"I guess that will depend upon what luck we have, Sam. If we strike the right spot first clip we ought to be back inside of five or six days."

As the party moved up the river they found the stream wound in and out between the mountains On either side were bare rocky walls or dense patches of timber, with here and there a tiny open space, now piled deep with snowdrifts.

"I see some rabbits ahead!" cried Tom presently. "Wonder if I can bring them down," he added, as he unslung his gun. But long before he could take aim the bunnies were out of sight amid the timber.

"You'll have to carry your gun in your hand for a shot at them," came from Dick. "But be careful, or you may trip up on some frozen twig and shoot somebody."

Mile after mile was passed, but no further game came to view, much to Tom's disgust.

"Not much right around here," said John Barrow, as he saw Tom put his gun back over his shoulder. "The boys from Timber Run have cleared the ground putty well. But you'll see something sure a little further on—and maybe more'n you bargain for."

"I'm not afraid of big game, Mr. Barrow. We faced some pretty bad animals when we were in Africa and out West."

"I allow that must be so, Tom. But you want to be careful even so. A big mountain deer or a bear aint to be fooled with, I can tell you that."

About eleven o'clock they came to the first falls above Timber Run. Here the water was frozen into solid masses, but the way was so uneven they found it profitable to take off their skates and "tote" the sleds around the spot. This necessitated a walk of several hundred feet through the timber skirting the edge of the river. The way was uncertain, and John Barrow went ahead, to steer the party clear of any danger.

"Finest timber in the world right here," he observed. "I can't see why the timber company don't get together and put it in the market. It would fetch a good price."

"Wait! I see something in yonder trees!" cried Dick, in a low voice. "Can you make out what they are?"

"Wild turkeys!" answered the guide. "Git down behind these bushes. If we can bag a few of them, we'll have rich eatin' for a few days!"

CHAPTER XV.

WILD TURKEYS.

Without delay the Rover boys dropped behind the bushes, and John Barrow did the same. All kept as quiet as possible, for they knew that on the first alarm the wild turkeys would be off.

The game was not over six feet from the ground, sitting in three rows on as many branches of a hemlock that overhung the stream. There were over a dozen in the flock, each as plump as wild turkeys ever get.

"How shall we fire?" asked Dick. "There is no call for all of us to shoot at the same bird."

"I'll take one on the left," answered John Barrow. "You take one on the right. Tom can take a middle one sitting high, and Sam a middle one sitting low. All ready?"

"Yes," came the answer, from one after another.

"Then fire when I say three. One, two—three!"

Bang! bang! went the firearms, and as the reports echoed through the forest, two of the wild turkeys were seen to drop dead under the branches upon which they had been sitting. One, that was badly wounded, fluttered down and began to thrash around in the brush. The rest of the flock flew away with a rush and were lost to sight between the trees.

"Three! That isn't so bad!" cried Dick, as they all started on a run forward. Soon they had the turkey on the ground surrounded, and John Barrow caught up the game and wrung its neck.

"I guess I missed my mark," came rather sheepishly from Tom.

"You!" exclaimed Sam, in surprise. "I was just going to say I had missed."

"Nobody missed," put in the guide.

"Nobody?" came from the three Rovers.

"Somebody must have missed," added Tom. "We fired four shots and only got three birds."

"One of those that flew off was wounded. He dropped a lot of feathers and went up in a shaky fashion. Of course, he got away, but just the same, he was hit."

"Well, I thought I missed clean and clear," said Tom doubtfully.

"And I thought I missed," laughed Sam. "I guess we'll have to divide that third bird between us, Tom."

"We've got all the wild-turkey meat we'll want on this trip," came from John Barrow. "Before this is gone, you'll want a change, I'll warrant you."

While the guide was caring for the birds the boys went back for the sleds. Soon they were again on the way, and they did not stop until the vicinity of the falls was left far behind and they had again reached a point where skating would be good for several miles.

"Reckon we can stop here and have dinner," observed the guide. "Feelin' kind o' hungry, aint you?"

"Just guess I am hungry," declared Tom "But I didn't want to say anything till the rest did."

Some of the cooking utensils were unpacked, and while the boys got wood for the fire, John Barrow brought out some coffee and other things. It was decided that they should not take time to cook a turkey until they went into camp for the night.

Soon a fire was blazing merrily. They built it under the outer end of a long tree limb, and from the limb suspended a pot full of water by a long iron chain they had brought along. As the ground was covered with snow, there was little danger of spreading a conflagration. Soon the water was boiling and the guide made a steaming pot of coffee, which was passed around in tin cups, with sugar and a little condensed milk. They had brought along bread, cheese, chipped beef, and boiled eggs, and also a mince pie which Mrs.

Barrow had baked the day before, and these made what Tom declared was a famous dinner.

"No sauce like hunger sauce," laughed John Barrow, as he saw the lads stow the food away. "Once I was trampin' the mountains all day without a mouthful when I chanced to look in a corner o' my game bag and found a slice o' bread, at least two weeks old. I ate that bread up, hard as it was, and nuthin' ever tasted sweeter."

"You're right," returned Dick. "The folks in the city who don't know what to get to tickle their appetite ought to go hungry a few times. Then I'm sure they'd appreciate what they got."

The midday meal finished, they lost no time in repacking the sled load and starting up the river once more. The stream was now wider than before, and presently spread out into a small lake.

"This is known as Tillard's Pond," said John Barrow. "Feller named Gus Tillard built his cabin over yonder, about ten years ago. He went out bar-huntin' one day, and Mr. Bar came along and chewed him up."

"Gracious! Then there must be pretty ugly customers in this vicinity," exclaimed Sam, with a shiver.

"Not so many as there used to be. After Tillard's death the boys over to the Run organized a b'ar hunt, and we brought in six o' the critters. Reckon thet scart the others—leas'wise no b'ars showed up fer a long while after."

Out on Tillard's Pond a stiff breeze was blowing, and consequently their progress was not as rapid as it had been, nor were any of them as warm as formerly.

"We're going to have a cold first night, I can tell you that," said Dick, and his prediction proved true. By the time the sun sank to rest behind the mountain in the west it was "snapping cold," as Tom expressed it. The wind increased until to go forward was almost impossible.

"I know a pretty good place to rest in," said the guide. "It isn't over quarter of a mile from here. If we can make that we'll be all right till mornin'."

John Barrow led the way, pulling one of the sleds, and the boys followed. Poor Sam was getting winded and skated only with the greatest of difficulty.

It was dark when they reached the location the guide had in mind—a rocky wall on one side of the river. At one point there was a split in the rocks. This was overgrown at the top with cedars and brushwood, forming something of a cave, ten or twelve feet wide and twice as deep, the bottom of which was of rock and fairly smooth.

"I camped here two winters ago," said John Barrow, as he called a halt. "I laced up the cedars above and they formed a fust-rate roof."

"I guess they are pretty well laced still," observed Dick. "They seem to hold the snow very well. But we won't dare to make a fire in there."

"We'll build a fire in front, in this hollow, Dick. That will throw a good deal of hot air into the place, and if we wrap ourselves in our blankets we'll be warm enough."

Everyone in the party was anxious to get out of the nipping wind, and they lost no time in entering the "cave," as Sam called it. The entrance was low, and by placing the two sleds in an upright position on either side they left an opening not over a yard wide. Directly in front of this the boys started a roaring fire, cutting down several dwarf cedars for that purpose.

"I don't much like the looks o' the sky to-night," observed John Barrow, after preparing one of the turkeys for cooking.

"Do you think there is a storm coming?" asked Tom.

"Looks to me like snow, an plenty of it."

"I hope it doesn't come until we reach Bear Pond," said Dick, "I don't want Dan Baxter and his crowd to get ahead of us."

"They won't have no better time o' it than we'll have," was the guide's grim comment. "Aint no fun trampin' over the mountains with the snow comin' down heavily; I can tell you that."

The wind continued to increase, and after the supper was cooked and brought into the shelter, the guide took it upon himself to bank the fire with great care, that it might not blow into the forest and start a big conflagration.

"We've had some terrible fires here," he said. "One threatened my barn two years ago, and we had to stay out two days an' a night a-fightin' it. It would be a bad thing a night like this."

To keep out the cold, Dick crawled to the top of the opening and bound in the cedar limbs closer than ever. He also got some brush-wood and some vines, and on these placed a thick layer of snow.

"That's fine!" cried Sam, from below. "It's almost as tight as the roof of a cabin."

Tightening the roof made a big difference inside, and when they had hung up a blanket behind the upright sleds, and placed some cedar brush on the floor, it was very cozy. They had brought along some candles, and one of these was lit and placed in a lantern which was in one of the packs. It was not a bright light, but it was better than sitting in the dark, and it seemed to make the shelter warmer than ever.

CHAPTER XVI.

ON THE WRONG TRAIL.

One of the turkeys was finished even to the neck piece, and then both Tom and Sam declared that they were so sleepy they could scarcely keep their eyes open.

"It must be the mountain air," said Dick. "I'm sleepy, too. Let us turn in."

"Will anybody have to stand watch?" asked Sam.

At this John Barrow shook his head. "Don't know as it's necessary," he said. "Reckon we're safe enough. I'll keep my gun handy, in case any animal prowls around."

The boys laid down and were soon in the land of dreams. Tom and Sam slept near the back wall, with Dick next, and the guide near the opening, which, however, was now completely closed by the blanket. The fire was allowed to die down, for they did not dare to build it up, with such a wind blowing.

Nothing came to disturb them. Once during the night Dick roused up and heard the distant howling of a wolf. But the beast did not venture close to the shelter, and while waiting for its appearance the youth dropped asleep again.

By midnight the wind fell a little, and then it began to snow, and it was still snowing when John Barrow leaped up, pushed the blanket aside, and gazed out upon the river.

"Hullo, we're in for it now!" he cried, and as the boys sat up, he added: "Snowin'—mighty hard, too."

"I should say it was snowing hard!" cried Tom, as he, too, looked out. "Why, you can't see the trees on the other side, and they aren't more than a hundred and fifty feet off."

"This will make traveling bad," said Dick soberly. "It almost looks as if we were going to be snowed in."

"Snowed in?" echoed Sam. "Oh, don't say that!"

The boys were somewhat stiff after their long skate of the day before, and it took them some minutes to pull themselves together. Then the curtain was pushed aside, and the fire started up with some dry brushwood from the pile on which they had slept. Soon breakfast was ready, and this warmed them up and put new life in them.

"No use to linger here," announced the guide. "It won't git no better an' it may git a heap sight worse. I reckon the wind kept some o' the spots on the river clear. I know a good camping spot ten miles from here, and that will be just the place for us while you are huntin' around fer that money."

"Then let us make that camping spot by all means," said Tom. "We mustn't let Baxter get first whack at the treasure."

It was eight o'clock when they started once more on their journey. The air was dull and heavy, and the snow came down in thick flakes, which presently shut out the landscape on all sides. Fortunately the wind had died down entirely, so it was not near so cold as it had been.

"It would be easy enough, if we could stick to the river all the way," remarked. Tom to Sam, as they skated along as best they could.

"Can't we?"

"Mr. Barrow says not. About two miles from here are another falls and a set of rocky rapids, and we'll have to walk around for a distance of nearly a mile through the woods."

What Tom said was true, and the falls were reached less than an hour later. The river was very narrow at this point and lined on both sides with rough rocks. Climbing was difficult, and after crawling along for a few rods the boys halted in dismay.

"We're up against it now," groaned Dick

"Don't be discouraged lads!" came from the guide. "It isn't so bad a short distance further on. Follow me." And he started again, and there was nothing to do but to fall in behind him.

John Barrow and Dick carried one sled, and Tom and Sam, the other. In some places the cedars and brush were so thick that those in advance pushed through only with extreme difficulty.

"Well, we haven't got the task of breaking the way," said Tom, as he and Sam stopped to get their wind. "It's no fool job to break through this thicket."

"We are going up a hill," returned Sam. "We must be getting away from the river."

The guide and Dick had disappeared ahead, and, fearful of losing them, the younger Rovers set off once more. Carrying the heavy sled up the hill was, however, a great task, especially for Sam, and once at the top they had to rest again.

"I believe it would have been just as easy to have kept to the river," declared Tom "See, there it is, to our left."

"It certainly doesn't look very rough down there," was his brother's comment. "Gracious, but Dick and Mr. Barrow plow along like steam engines!" he added. "I can't go so fast."

"We won't hurry, there is no need. The trail is plain enough," said Tom, and so they rested fully quarter of an hour. Then they heard Dick calling to them from a long distance ahead.

"All right; we're coming!" Tom called back. "Just please don't go so awfully fast!"

"We are going to take the trail to the left!" Dick shouted back, but the others did not catch the words.

Tom and Sam advanced now slower than ever, and when they reached a spot where there was an opening to the right and another to the left, the others were not only out of sight, but out of hearing as well. It had now begun to snow more thickly than ever.

"Which way did they take?" questioned Sam, in perplexity.

"Reckon they went this way, Sam."

"It looks to me as if they went the other way. Here are some footprints."

"Here are some footprints, too."

They came to a standstill, more perplexed than ever. Sure enough, there were two sets of footprints, running almost at right angles to each other.

"I guess we've hit somebody else's trail," said Sam. "Dick! Mr. Barrow! Where are you?" he called out.

No answer came back, and then the two boys shouted in chorus. All remained as silent as before.

"Well, this is a mess, to say the least," was Tom's comment. "How are we to know which trail to follow?"

"I move we make a sure thing of it and get down to the river again," was Sam's answer. "Then we'll be certain to be on the right track. As soon as they reach the river they'll wait for us."

This seemed sensible advice, and leaving both trails the boys plunged through the cedar brakes to where they had seen the icy surface of the stream. They had to make several turns, and once Tom lost his footing and rolled over and over in the snow. But at last they gained the smooth ice, and then each breathed a long sigh of relief.

"It's ten times better than climbing around," observed Sam. "The rapids and rocks amount to next to nothing. I don't see why Mr. Barrow gave us all that extra climbing."

"Perhaps the river has changed since he was up here last," said Tom. "Anyway, it's a good bit narrower here than it was further back."

Sliding down the hillside had loosened the load on the sled, and they had to spend a good five minutes in fastening it and mending a strap that had broken. Then several minutes more were consumed in putting on their skates.

"My! how it does snow!" came from Tom, as they started at last. "I can't see fifty feet ahead."

"Nor I, Tom. I really wish we were with Dick and Mr. Barrow."

"So do I, but I guess it's all right."

Forward they pushed, dragging the sled after them. It was rough work, and the ice was often covered too deep with snow to make skating a pleasure.

"It seems to me the river is getting narrower than ever," said Sam. "It's queer, too, for Mr. Barrow said it was quite broad near the lake."

"He said one of the branches was broad, Sam. We must be on a different branch."

"Let us call to them again."

Once more they cried out, at the top of their lungs. But nothing answered them, not even a muffled echo. All was swallowed up in the loneliness of the situation and in the fast falling snow, which now covered even the load on the sled to the depth of an inch or more.

"Come on," said Sam half desperately. "We must catch up to them, sooner or later."

"Perhaps we are ahead of them."

"It isn't likely. Let us go on, anyway."

And on they went, another quarter of a mile. The stream was now broader, and this raised their hopes considerably. But suddenly Tom gave a cry of dismay.

"Look, Sam! We have reached the end of the stream!"

Sam strained his eyes and went on a few feet further. Then he gave a groan. His brother was right, the stream had come to an end in a pond probably a hundred feet in diameter. They had not been following the Perch River at all, but merely a brook flowing into that stream!

CHAPTER XVII.

AN UNEXPECTED DISCOVERY.

"Tom, we have missed it!"

"It looks like it, Sam."

"What we took for the river wasn't the river at all. We must be a mile or two out of the way."

"There is nothing to do but to go back," was the dismal response.

"Don't you think we might strike the river without going back?"

"We might, and then again we might not. I hardly feel like taking the risk—in this blinding snow."

With heavy hearts the brothers turned the sled around and proceeded on the back trail, if such the way may be called. As a matter of fact, the snow had covered their footprints completely.

The wind was now rising again, and it blew directly into their faces. Alarmed more than ever, on this account, they pushed on until poor Sam was almost winded.

"I—I can't go on so fast, no use in trying!" he panted. "I feel ready to drop!"

"I'm fagged out myself," responded Tom. "But, Sam, we can't afford to rest here."

"I know that, but I've got to get my wind back somehow. The wind seems to be awfully strong."

They rested for several minutes, and then pushed on again, Tom dragging the sled alone. It was a bitter journey, and both would have given a good deal to have been with Dick and the guide once more.

"We missed it when we didn't keep up with them in the first place," was Tom's comment. "However, there's no use in crying over spilt milk, as the saying goes. We must make the best of it."

"There isn't any best," grumbled Sam. "It's all worst!" And then Tom laughed, in spite of the seriousness of the situation.

At last they gained the spot where they had first struck the brook, and here they halted again.

"The worst of it is, there is no telling how far this brook runs before it empties into the Perch River," observed Tom. "We may have to go two or three miles out of our way."

"We may as well climb up the hill again, Tom, and try to follow one of those trails."

"Perhaps you are right."

They talked the matter over and at last began to climb the hill, now more difficult than before, since the snow was several inches deeper. It took a long while to gain the top, and still longer to find the spot where they had left the trail.

"Here we are," said Tom, resting on a fallen tree which marked the locality. "Now the all-important question is, which way next?"

"Tom, I believe we are getting lost," came from Sam, in a dismal tone.

"I don't think we're getting lost, Sam; we *are* lost, no two ways about it. We've got to keep our eyes open and our wits about us, or we'll be getting into a first-class mess."

"It must be almost noon," went on the youngest Rover, and pulled out his watch. "Phew! Half-past twelve!"

"Thought I was hungry. Is there anything in this load good to eat?"

"I don't know. Let us look and see. We can't go on, hungry."

They unstrapped the load and examined it. There were blankets there and some camp utensils, and a box containing crackers, cheese, and chipped beef.

"Crackers and cheese will do on a pinch," said Tom. "Come, we mustn't lose more time than is necessary."

Yet eating and resting was very pleasant, and they spent the best part of half an hour under the sheltering limbs of a big cedar tree. Both were dry, but eating snow did not seem to quench their thirst. The wind increased as they ate, but the snow now came down more lightly.

They decided to strike out on something of a trail running to the northwest. It was hard work hauling and carrying the sled over the rocks and through the bushes, and they often had to halt for breath.

"There goes something!" cried Tom presently. "Sam, did you see it?"

"I saw something, but it disappeared before I could make out what it was."

The object had crossed their path a hundred feet ahead of them. Now it reappeared somewhat closer, and both boys saw that it was a lean and hungry-looking wolf.

"A wolf!" cried Sam.

"Wonder if I hadn't better shoot him," said Tom, unslinging his gun.

"Better save your powder, Tom. I don't believe he'll attack us—at least not while it is light."

"A shot might bring an answering signal from Dick," went on Tom suddenly. "What fools we have been, not to think of that before!"

The wolf kept hidden and Tom did not shoot, expecting to see the beast reappear at any instant. On they went, keeping an eye on the bushes and trees on both sides of them. Once they heard the patter of the wolf's feet on a stretch of bare rocks, but that was all.

"I'll fire a shot, anyway," said Tom at last, and aimed in the direction where they had heard the sounds last. To his intense surprise a yelp and a snarl followed.

"Great Cæsar! I hit him after all," began Tom, and then leaped back. "Look out, Sam, he's coming for us!"

Tom was right. The wolf, wounded in the left flank, had suddenly appeared. His eyes blazed with pain and fury, and he made as if to spring upon the boys.

Tom was in front of the sled and Sam behind it. With a quick leap Tom cleared the load and took up a position beside the youngest Rover.

The wolf made the leap, but stopped short on the top of the load. As he prepared to spring again Tom swung his gun around by the barrel and hit the wolf a smart rap on the head. The animal rolled over on the ground.

"Shoot him, Sam!"

"I will, if I can!" came from Sam, who had now unslung his gun. Taking a quick aim, he fired.

The shot proved a good one, for it took the wolf directly in the neck, just as he was scrambling to rise. Again he gave a yelp, and then began to turn over and over in his intense pain. Of a sudden he leaped up and landed on Tom's shoulder.

For the instant poor Tom thought his last moment had come. But as the beast landed Sam struck it with his gun, and down it went once more, snarling viciously. Then it rolled and tossed until some brush was gained, when it managed to hide itself and crawl away, seriously, if not mortally, wounded.

"He's gone!" came from Sam.

"Well, don't go after him," panted Tom. "Let him go and welcome. I never want to see him again."

"Nor I."

Both reloaded with all haste—having learned years before that it is foolish to remain in the wilds with an empty firearm. Then they waited, to see if the wolf would return.

"Hark!" cried Sam. "Did you hear that shot, Tom?"

"I did. I think it came from that direction." And Tom pointed with his hand.

"I think so myself. It must be Dick or Mr. Barrow, firing."

"More than likely. Let us follow up the shot."

They listened, but no more shots followed, and then they went on, over a stretch which was comparatively smooth and free from brushwood. But though they covered a quarter of a mile they saw nothing either of the river or of their lost companions.

"We're getting lost more than ever," groaned Sam. "I declare I haven't the least idea where we are."

"I'm going to fire another shot," answered his brother, and proceeded to do so.

Both listened with strained ears, and soon an answering shot came back, slightly to the left of the path they had been pursuing.

"Thank fortune, we are getting closer!" cried Sam. "Come on!"

As worn out as they were, they resumed the dragging of the sled through the snow. Once Sam had suggested they abandon the load, but Tom would not hear of this, for he knew they could not very well do without this portion of the outfit.

The wind was blowing heavily, and high overhead they heard the tree-tops creak ominously. Once in a while a tree branch would unload itself, sending down a great mass of snow on their heads. But they pushed on, determined to rest no more until the others of the party should be sighted.

Presently they came to a clearing overlooking a small pond and a stream beyond. At first Tom imagined that this was the pond they had left but a short while before, but a second look showed him that the locality was an entirely new one to them.

"My gracious, Tom! Get out of sight!" came in an excited whisper from Sam, and he pulled his brother down behind a clump of bushes, and then dragged the sled after him.

"What do you see?" demanded Tom.

"Look across the pond. As sure as you are born, there are Dan Baxter and Jasper Grinder. We've been following them instead of Dick and Mr. Barrow!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN THE CAMP OF THE ENEMY.

What Sam said was true. There, gathered around a fire on the opposite side of the pond, were Dan Baxter, Jasper Grinder, and a tall, powerfully built fellow whom they easily guessed was Bill Harney, the guide. They had two sleds with them, and one of these had been unloaded and the camping outfit lay scattered around.

"Well, this is a surprise and no mistake!" was Tom's comment, in a low voice. "If I know anything about it, they must have done some quick traveling."

"I believe they followed the river, at least part of the way," returned the youngest Rover. "I see a pair of skates lying by one of the sleds."

"Do you suppose Dick and Mr. Barrow met them?"

"I don't believe they did. See, they have some rabbits they are going to cook. That accounts for the shots we heard."

Crouching down behind the bushes, the two Rovers watched the other party with interest. A lively conversation was going oh between Dan Baxter and the former teacher of Putnam Hall, but they were too far off to catch anything of what was said.

"What do you propose doing next?" asked Sam, after a pause of several minutes. "It's mighty cold here."

"We may as well retreat, Sam. We don't want to expose ourselves, do we?"

"I don't suppose it would do any good—although I'm not afraid of Baxter, or Grinder either."

"It isn't that. If they know we have arrived here, they will do all they can to locate that treasure first. We want to keep dark and get ahead of them."

"But how shall we turn?"

"We'll have to go back to where we found the two trails crossed and then try the other one. I don't know of anything else to do."

"Wouldn't Dan Baxter be surprised, if he knew we were so close?"

"Well, we won't let him know."

"Why not?" demanded an unexpected voice from the rear.

Both boys started and turned around, to find themselves confronted by Lemuel Husty, the man Dick had seen in company with Baxter at Cedarville.

"Hullo, who are you?" asked Tom, as quickly as he could recover from his surprise.

"If you want to know real bad, youngster, my name is Lemuel Husty."

"I don't know you."

"But I know you—leas'wise I know of you," went on Husty, with a frown. "You're down on my friend Baxter, aint you?"

"If we are, we have a good reason to be," came from Sam.

"Perhaps you have, and then again, perhaps you haven't. It aint no nice thing to be cotched spying, though."

"We weren't spying. We came up quite by accident."

"You can tell that to the monkeys, but you can't tell it to me," growled Lemuel Husty. Then he raised his voice: "I say, Baxter! I say, you fellows! Come over here!"

The three around the camp-fire looked up in surprise, and were even more surprised when Husty waved his hand for them to come to him.

"What's wanted?" demanded Dan Baxter.

"I've found two of your very intimate friends spying on you," answered Husty.

"I guess we had better get out," whispered Sam to Tom, not liking the turn affairs had taken.

"I'm with you," returned Tom.

"No, you don't!" cried Husty, and caught hold of the sled. "You just stay here until we talk this thing over."

Tom's hands were on his gun, and for the moment he felt like pointing the weapon at the man. But then he concluded that this would do small good, and the weapon remained where it was.

In a minute Dan Baxter came running across the pond, with Jasper Grinder and Bill Harney at his heels. Each of the advancing party carried some sort of firearms.

"Tom and Sam Rover!" ejaculated Baxter, and it was easy to see that he was completely surprised. "How did you get here?"

"Walked and skated," returned Tom, as coolly as he could.

"You've got a nerve to follow me and my party," went on Baxter, with an ugly scowl.

"As I just said to this man, Baxter, we haven't been following you," put in Sam. "We struck your trail by accident. We thought we were following——"

"Never mind about that, Sam," interrupted Tom quickly.

"Who did you think you were following?" demanded Dan Baxter.

"It's none of your business, Baxter. We have as much right to be here as you have."

"Humph! Don't you suppose I know why you came?"

"More than likely you do, and we know why you came."

"Have you got another map?" demanded Baxter, in curiosity.

"It's none of your affair what we have. We stumbled upon you by accident, and if you haven't anything in particular to say to us we'll be going."

"You needn't leave so quickly. Where is Dick?"

"He isn't so very far off."

"You hired John Barrow for a guide, I heard," put in Bill Harney.

"If we did, we had a right to do it," said Sam.

"He don't know these parts as well as he might. If you don't look out he'll lose you in the mountains, and you'll never get home alive."

"Let him lose them," put in Baxter quickly. "It's what they deserve. But, come, it's cold over here. Let's move back to the fire. And I want you two to come along," he added, to the Rovers.

"We don't propose to come along," replied Tom.

"And I say you shall come, Tom Rover. We are four to two, and you had better submit."

"Yes, make them come," put in Jasper Grinder. "I want to have a talk with them." And he glared wickedly, first at Tom and then at Sam.

It must be confessed that Tom and Sam felt in anything but an enviable position. They knew Dan Baxter thoroughly, and knew he would stop at nothing to accomplish his purpose.

"The best thing you can do is to leave us alone," said Tom steadily. "You have always got the worst of the bargain, Dan Baxter, and if you try any game on now, you'll miss it again."

"I'll risk it, Tom Rover. Come now, and no more fooling. If you behave yourself, there won't be any trouble."

There was, then, nothing to do but to follow, for neither of the Rovers wished to lose this portion of the outfit. Soon the whole party were gathered around the fire, which Husty heaped high with brushwood. Back of the fire was a high cliff, topped with cedars, which kept off the wind and made the situation a fairly comfortable one.

"Now we had better come to an understanding," said Dan Baxter, as he warmed his hands. "We all know what we are out here for, so there is no use in mincing matters."

"I understand all I want to know," answered Tom briefly.

"So do I," put in Sam.

"Baxter shall settle with you, and then I'll settle," growled Jasper Grinder. "I have not forgotten how I was treated at Putnam Hall because of you."

"It served you right that you were kicked out," said Sam, without stopping to think twice.

"Ha! you dare to talk to me in this fashion!" roared the former teacher. "I'll teach you a lesson! Just wait till I find a good switch!"

"Hold on Grinder! one at a time," put in Dan Baxter. "I'll settle with them first, if you please."

"They deserve a thorough thrashing," grumbled the irate man.

"Now I want you to tell me the truth," went on Dan Baxter, addressing Tom and Sam. "Where did you get a map of that treasure? In the cave on that island?"

"We haven't said we had a map," returned Tom.

"But you must have a map—or something like it."

"Whatever we have, it's none of your business, Dan Baxter," broke in Sam.

"Shut up, you little imp! Don't you know you are in my power!" stormed Baxter, in a rage. "I can do as I please out here, and these three men will help me."

As he finished he caught Sam by the collar and began to shake him.

"Let my brother alone!" ejaculated Tom. "Let up, I say!"

"I won't, Tom Rover. He's got to learn that I'm the master here," howled Baxter.

"If you don't let go, I'll hit you," went on Tom, and raised his right fist. But ere he could deliver the blow Bill Harney rushed behind him, caught him by the waist and threw him flat.

"That's right!" shouted Dan Baxter. "Make them both prisoners! I've got a big score to settle with them!"

And then all four fell upon Sam and Tom, and a fierce struggle ensued, the outcome of which was for some time hard to predict.

CHAPTER XIX.

DICK AND THE WILDCAT.

"Well, it's mighty funny Tom and Sam don't come up."

It was Dick who spoke. He stood in the shelter of a number of walnut trees, and close at hand was John Barrow.

The pair had missed the others ten minutes before, and were now waiting impatiently for their reappearance.

"It can't be as how they missed the trail in this snow," said John Barrow soberly. "Let us shout for 'em."

They set up a shout, and waited impatiently for an answer. But none came, and they called again.

"We had better go back for them," said Dick, his face full of a troubled look. "I wouldn't have them get lost in this snowstorm for the world."

It was decided to leave the sled where it was, and soon they were hurrying along the back trail. But the snow and wind were against them, and they made slow progress.

"It will not be necessary to relate all the particulars of the next three hours. In vain they looked for Tom and Sam. Not a trace of the missing lads could be discovered.

"This the worst yet!" groaned Dick, as he came to a halt, all out of breath. "I thought, all along, that they were keeping close behind us!"

"I told them to do so," returned the guide.

They had fired several shots, but the reports had failed, as we know, to reach the ears of the missing Rovers. They were now at their wits' end regarding what to do next.

"I'd give a hundred dollars rather than have this happen," went on Dick. "Why, they'll starve to death if they really get lost!"

"Oh, aint you mistaken there, Dick? They have the other sled, remember; and each o' 'em has a gun for to bring down any game as is wanted."

"That's true, and it's one comfort. But there is no telling when they reach civilization again. Why, this forest is about as bad as some places in the far West."

"I believe you there, lad. Well, they've got to make the best o' it. I reckon they'll strike out for the river and come up that to Bear Pond, over the rocks an' rapids an' all."

Supper time found the pair on the river again, four miles below Bear Pond. It was decided that they should camp at that spot for the night.

"We'll build a big camp-fire and keep it a-going," said Dick. "Perhaps they will see it."

"That's an idee," returned John Barrow, and before doing anything else the camp-fire was started, in an open spot along the river bank. Dick saw to it that it blazed up merrily, and kept piling on all the dry brushwood he could find, until the flames shot up fully twenty feet into the air, making the surroundings as bright as day.

For supper they cooked another of the wild turkeys, but it must be confessed that Dick had little appetite for eating. John Barrow noticed it, and he did his best to cheer up the youth.

"Don't worry too much, lad," he said. "Take my word on it, they'll turn up by morning, sure. You've said yourself they've been through putty tryin' times, in Africa and out West."

On the way to the river John Barrow had brought down several rabbits and some birds, and these were hung up on the low branches of a nearby tree. They proceeded to make themselves comfortable under this tree, cutting down some cedar branches for a flooring, and banking up some other branches and some snow to keep off the wind.

"I don't think I'll go to sleep," said Dick. "I'm going to keep the fire piled high, so that it will light up as it's doing now."

"Then I'll turn in right away," answered the guide. "It's eight o'clock. You call me at two, and that will be givin' you a fair nap afore daybreak." And so it was agreed.

It did not take John Barrow long to settle himself, and soon he was snoring as peacefully as though lying in his bed at home. Sitting down close to the fire, Dick gave himself up to his thoughts.

And what numerous thoughts they were—of home and of school, of his brothers, and of the Baxters and their other enemies, and of all that had happened since they had first started to go to Putnam Hall. And then he thought of the Lanings and of the Stanhopes, and lingered long over the mental picture of sweet Dora and of what she had last said to him.

"She's just an all-right girl," he said to himself. "Heaven bless her and keep her from any further trouble!"

When the fire showed signs of burning low he arose and piled on more brushwood. There was hardly enough at hand to suit him, and, ax in hand, he started back from the river, to cut more.

He was within fifteen feet of some dense bushes when of a sudden he came to a halt, as he saw a pair of gleaming eyes glaring at him. As soon as he noticed the eyes they disappeared.

"A wild animal," he thought. "Can it be a wolf?"

Retracing his steps to the fire, he caught up his gun and waited. But the animal did not appear, nor did Dick hear any sound save the murmur of the wind through the snow-clad trees.

The youth wondered if he ought to awaken the guide, but finally resolved to let John Barrow sleep. "I ought to be able to take care of one wolf," he reasoned. "I've taken care of worse than that in my time."

Gun in hand, he advanced upon the bushes once more. He expected to see a wolf slink away at any moment, but no beast came to view, and, after walking

completely around the growth, he laid down the gun and went to work vigorously with the ax.

Bush after bush was brought down in rapid succession, until in ten minutes Dick calculated he had cut sufficient to last the camp-fire for the rest of the night. Then he lowered the ax and caught up a large bush, to drag it close to the blaze.

As he turned around he met a sight that, for the instant, chilled him to the backbone. There, between the blaze and the tree under which John Barrow was sleeping, crouched a wildcat, a large, fierce-looking creature, with fire-shot eyes and a stubby tail which was moving noiselessly from side by side, as the creature prepared itself to make a leap.

"Gracious! he's going to attack Mr. Barrow!" thought Dick, but even as this flashed over his mind the wildcat made a leap into the tree, close to where hung the game the guide had brought down some hours before.

"Thank goodness, he's only after the meat," thought Dick, and the chill he had experienced passed away. Then, struck with a new idea, he leaped for his gun.

Several twigs of the tree were in the way of getting a good aim, and he had to circle around to the other side before he could get another good view of the wildcat. In the meantime the beast had grabbed up the wild turkey that was left, and clutching it tight in its mouth, started to drop to the snow-covered ground.

Bang! went the gun and the charge of heavy shot took the wildcat in the left flank, making a bad, but not a fatal, wound. The beast dropped the wild turkey and let out a fearful snarl of rage. Then it saw Dick, gave another snarl, and leaped toward the youth.

The gun was double-barreled, and once more Dick let drive. But he was not overly cool, and the charge merely nipped the beast in its left front leg. It continued to come on, and as it did so Dick commenced to retreat.

"Hi! what's up?" came from John Barrow, and throwing aside his blanket, he leaped to his feet.

"A wildcat!" ejaculated Dick. "Quick! Shoot him!"

"By gosh!" muttered the guide, and blinking in the bright light of the fire, he reached for his rifle, which he had brought along in addition to his shotgun.

By this time the wildcat was close to Dick, and now, watching its opportunity, it leaped upon the youth, trying to bury its claws in Dick's shoulder.

Hardly knowing what to do, Dick brought around the gun barrel and poked it into the open mouth of the wildcat. With a gurgle of pain the beast fell back, but quickly gathered itself for another leap.

"Back!" shouted John Barrow. "Back, and let me git a shot at the critter!"

Dick was perfectly willing to retreat, and started to do so. But the wildcat was too quick for him, and in a twinkle youth and beast were down on the ground together, and the wildcat was trying to reach the boy's throat with its cruel fangs!

CHAPTER XX.

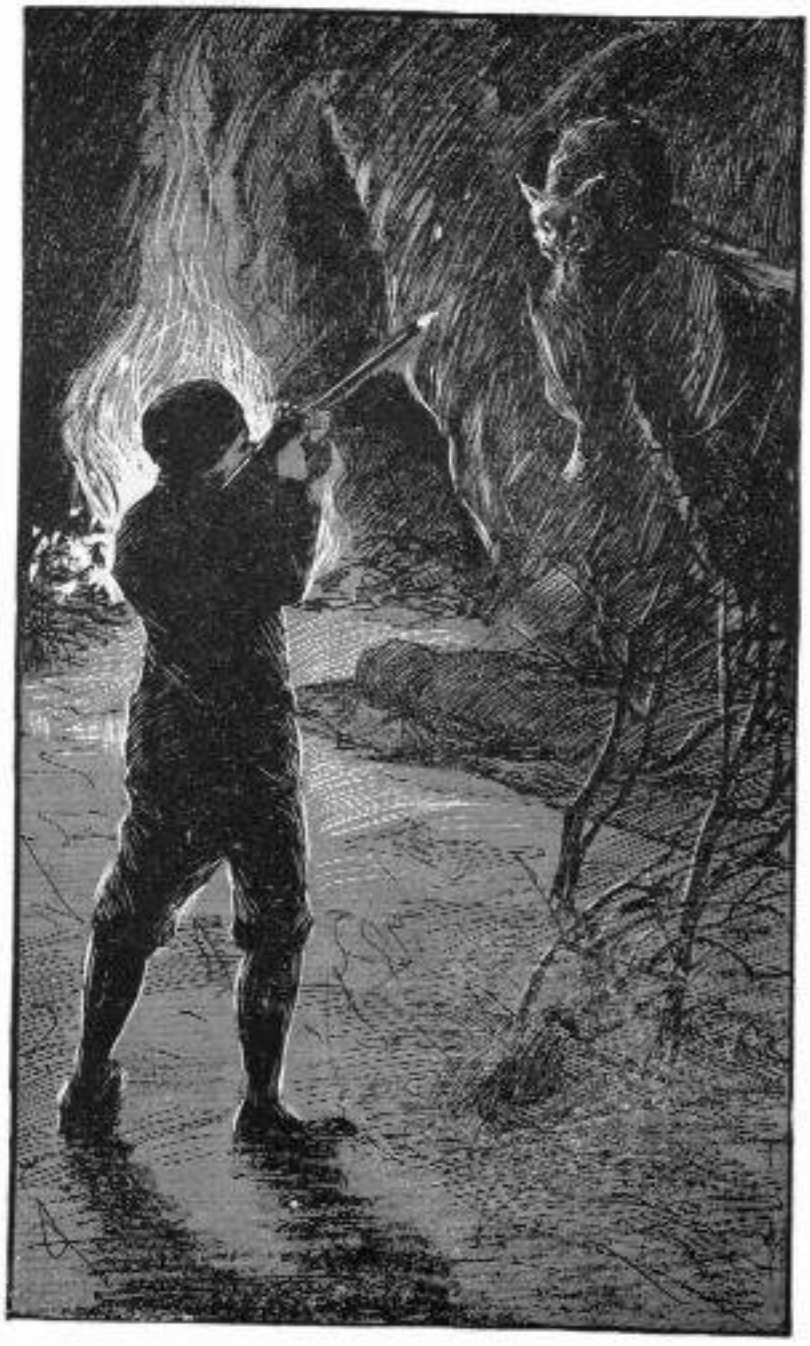
BEAR POND AT LAST.

It was indeed a moment of supreme peril, and Dick felt very much as if his last moment on earth had come. He put out his hands mechanically and grabbed the wildcat by the throat, but his grip was poor and the beast shook itself clear with ease.

It was now that John Barrow showed himself to be a master of quick resources. To fire his rifle at the wildcat would have meant taking the risk of hitting Dick, and this the guide thought too perilous. Leaping to the fire, he caught up a long, burning brand and rushed at the beast with this.

To have a part of the fire thrust directly into its eyes was more than the beast had bargained for, and as soon as it felt the flame it gave a cry of alarm and fell back. As it did this Dick leaped to his feet and sprang several feet away.

John Barrow was now free to shoot, and hurling the firebrand at the wildcat, he caught up his rifle and blazed away in short order. The wildcat had turned to retreat, but the guide was too



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quick for it, and down went the beast with a shot through its head. It gave a shudder or two, and then stretched out, dead.

"Is he—he dead?" panted Dick, when he felt able to speak.

"Reckon so," responded John Barrow. "But I'll make sure." And catching up a club, he aimed a blow which crushed the animal's skull.

"That was a narrow escape," went on Dick. "If you hadn't come to my aid, I'm afraid he would have done me up." And he shivered from head to foot.

"You want to be careful how you attack wildcats around here, lad. It aint likely they'll tech you, if you don't tech them. But if you do, why, look out, that's all."

"Do you think he would have sneaked off with the turkey? I was thinking first he would attack you."

"Reckon he was after the game, and nuthin' more, Dick. He must have been powerful hungry, or he wouldn't have come so close to us. He's a putty big fellow," went on the guide, as he dragged the carcass closer to the firelight.

The fire was burning low, and Dick lost no time in heaping on some of the newly cut brushwood, and then he reloaded and the guide did the same.

"Might have a mate around," suggested John Barrow. "We had better keep our eyes peeled, or we may be surprised. Wonder what time it is?"

By consulting a watch they found it was just midnight. After the excitement Dick felt quite sleepy, and inside of half an hour he followed the guide's advice and laid down to rest—not under the tree, however, but as close to the camp-fire as safety permitted.

Dick had requested John Barrow to call him in three hours, so that the guide might get a little more sleep, but the youth was allowed to slumber until he aroused of his own accord, just as day was breaking.

"Hullo, I've slept all night!" he exclaimed, leaping up with something of a hurt look. "Why didn't you call me?"

"I thought as how you needed the rest," was the answer from the guide.

"Aren't you sleepy?"

"Not very. A sleep early in the night generally does me more good nor hours o' it later on."

"You haven't seen or heard anything of Tom or Sam?"

"Nary sight or sound, lad. It's too bad, but don't worry too much."

"They couldn't have seen the firelight," returned Dick, with a sorry shake of his head. "It beats all where they went to, doesn't it?"

"I've been a-thinking that maybe they went on ahead, Dick."

"Ahead? That they somehow passed us?"

"Yes; while we were lookin' for 'em. They may be up at B'ar Pond now, waitin' for us."

"Do you advise going up there?"

"We might as well. We can put up a post here, with a message for 'em—in case they do come this way."

"That's an idea, and we can put up other posts, too. Then, if they strike our trail, they'll be sure to go straight in following us." And Dick's face brightened a bit.

John Barrow was already preparing breakfast, and he agreed with Dick to leave some cooked meat in a cloth tied to the top of the pole the youth erected not far from the fire. On the cloth they pinned a note, telling of the direction to Bear Pond, and asking Tom and Sam to follow and fire two shots, a minute apart, as a signal.

It was a clear day and the sun, shining over the mountain tops, made the snow and ice glitter like pearls and diamonds. There was no wind, so the journey toward Bear Pond was far from unpleasant. They moved slowly, dragging the sled behind them, and searching to the right and the left for some trace of the missing Rovers.

"I don't believe they came up here," said Dick after half the distance to the pond had been covered, "I don't see the least trace of any human being, although I've seen the footprints of several wild animals."

"The wind might have covered the tracks during the night," was John Barrow's hopeful response.

"I'd rather lose the treasure, even if it is worth thousands, than have anything happen to Sam and Tom."

Just before noon they came to a point in the river where it divided into several branches.

"We'll stop here and put up another sign pole," said the guide. "Remember what I said? All these streams run into the pond and into Perch River. Now, which one you want, at tudder end, I don't know."

"Which is the largest branch?"

"Can't say, exactly. This one an' the one yonder are about the same size, and that one aint much smaller."

"Well, which do you suppose was the largest years ago?"

"Can't say that neither, although that one yonder might have been, by the looks o' the banks."

"Then let us start on that one. And if that fails us, we can then try the others."

They skated to the stream in question and erected a pole in the middle of the ice, upon which a second note was posted. Having gone to the trouble of chopping a hole for the pole, John Barrow suggested they might try their hand at fishing.

"Might as well stay here a while," he said. "If they are behind us, they may catch up."

Dick was willing, and soon a line was baited and let down into the hole. It was in the water only a few seconds when the guide felt a bite and drew up a fine fish, weighing at least half a pound.

Dick was anxious to try it, and took the line from John Barrow's hands. He was equally successful, and in a short while they had seven fish to their credit, weighing from a quarter to three-quarters of a pound apiece.

"I'm going to tie a fish to the top of the pole," said Dick. "They may be hungry when they get here, especially if they miss the pole at our last camping place."

"They won't want to eat raw fish, lad."

"No, and I'm going to put a few matches in a paper and tie it to the fish, so they can cook it, if they wish."

Dick's idea was followed out, and once more they went on, up a narrow stream which had many a turn among the cedar brakes and hemlocks which lined either side. Rocks were likewise numerous, and the lad came to the conclusion that locating the treasure was going to be no easy task.

"It's rather desolate," he remarked. "I wonder what ever possessed that old Goupert to come here?"

"It's not so desolate in the summer time, Dick. But I reckon Goupert was a mighty odd stick, as it was."

At last they rounded a turn in the stream and came in sight of Bear Pond, a long and wide stretch of water located in the very midst of two tall mountains. The pond was covered with thick ice, and the snow lay upon it in long drifts and ridges. The ice was blackish and almost as hard as flint.

"We may as well go into camp near the mouth of this stream," said Dick. "For from this spot we'll make our first hunt for the treasure."

"I hope with all my heart that you find it, lad. But if you don't, don't be too disappointed."

"I want to find Sam and Tom first. I shan't hunt for the treasure until I know of them."

"That's right. We'll go on a hunt this afternoon, jest as soon as we've had some of these fish broiled for dinner."

If there was one thing which John Barrow could do to perfection, it was to broil fish, and the meal he set before Dick half an hour later was so appetizing the lad could not help enjoy it, in spite of his anxiety over his brothers' prolonged absence. The fish was as sweet as a nut, and both lingered some time over the meal, until all that had been broiled were gone.

"And now to find Tom and Sam," said Dick, at last, as he leaped up from the log upon which he had been sitting. "What shall we do with our things?"

"Here is a hole in the rocks," answered the guide. "We'll hide them there and cover them with stones. I don't think anything will disturb the things between now and nightfall."

The stores were placed in the cache and carefully covered, so that the wild animals might not get at them, and then they saw to it that their firearms were ready for use. A minute later they were off, on the hunt for Tom and Sam.

CHAPTER XXI.

A PAIR OF PRISONERS.

It is high time that we return to Tom and Sam, and learn how the two Rover boys were faring in their unequal contest with Dan Baxter and his followers.

As we know, it was Baxter himself who attacked Sam, while big Bill Harney threw Tom to the ground. Jasper Grinder went to Baxter's assistance, while Lemuel Husty ran to aid Harney.

"Let go of him!" cried Sam, and managed to hit Baxter a glancing blow on the cheek.

"I'll not let go yet," answered Baxter, and bore the youngest Rover to the earth. Over and over they rolled in the snow, until Grinder caught Sam by the legs and held him still.

"That's right, Grinder, hold him!" panted Dan Baxter. "Don't let him get up!"

But Sam was not yet subdued, and getting one foot clear at last, he kicked Jasper Grinder in the ear.

"Oh! oh! my ear!" screamed the former teacher. "He has kicked my ear off. You scamp, take that!" And letting out with his foot, he gave Sam a vigorous kick on the side. At the same time Baxter struck the boy in the head with a stick he had been carrying, and then Sam suddenly lost consciousness.

In the meantime Tom was having a similar struggle with Harney and Husty. But the boy, though strong, was no match for the two men, and they soon pinned him to the ground and held him there as in a vise, while he was nearly choked by the big guide, who had clutched him by the throat.

"Let—let go—my—throat!" Tom managed to gasp.

"Will you keep quiet?" demanded Harney.

"Yes—yes."

"All right, mind you do." And then the guide released his hold, but continued to sit as he was, astride of poor Tom's chest.

"Have you got him?" came from Dan Baxter.

"Yes," returned the big guide.

"All right; then hold him."

"I will."

Leaving Sam to be watched by Jasper Grinder, Baxter ran over to one of the sleds and procured a long rope.

"Now then, Tom Rover, get up," he said sourly.

Tom was glad to arise.

"What are you going to do with me?" he questioned.

"You'll see fast enough."

"Going to try your old tricks of making me a prisoner, I suppose."

"You're a prisoner already."

"Thank you, for nothing," returned Tom, as coolly as he could.

"Don't you get impudent, Tom Rover. If you try it on, you'll get more than you bargain for, let me tell you that."

"You always were a first-class bully, Baxter. You like to tackle little boys, or else somebody who is helpless."

"Shut up! I won't listen to you, now!" roared Baxter, and grabbing Tom's hands he forced them back and bound them together. Then the ropes was passed around Tom's waist, so that he could not move his hands to the front.

By the time this work was accomplished Sam was regaining consciousness. He gave a moan of pain, and then sat up in bewilderment.

"Who—what's happened?" he stammered. Then he looked around. "Oh! I remember now!"

He was very unsteady when he got on his feet, and it was Tom who made the first move toward him.

"Too bad, Sam. They are a set of brutes."

"Don't call me a brute Rover," growled Jasper Grinder. "Neither you nor your brother have all you deserve."

Sam was bound with a rope, and then both prisoners were told to walk over to the fire. This they did, and were left in charge of Husty and Jasper Grinder, while Baxter went off a distance, in company with big Bill Harney.

"Well, what do you want to do with 'em?" demanded Harney, when he and the bully were out of hearing of the others, "'Pears to me you've taken the law in yer own hands."

"I'm glad I've caught them," returned Dan Baxter. "They may help us to find what I am after."

"Think they've got a better map nor yours?"

"They may have."

"Supposing that brother comes up, with John Barrow? They may make it hot for us."

"That's what I want to ask you about, Harney. Isn't there some place around here where we might hide the prisoners? A cave, or something like that?"

The big guide scratched his chin thoughtfully.

"There's a tolerable place about quarter of a mile from here—the old B'ars' Hole, we use ter call it."

"Of course we don't want to run up against any bears," said Baxter, with a show of nervousness.

At this the big guide let out a rough laugh.

"Aint got no use fer them critters, eh?"

"I have not."

"'Taint likely there are any b'ars around. Me an Jim Wister cleaned out the hole last spring—got three on 'em. No new b'ars will take that hole yet awhile."

"Then we had better make tracks for it at once—before Dick Rover and the man who is with him get on our trail."

They walked back to the camp-fire and, calling Jasper Grinder and Lemuel Husty aside, Baxter explained the situation. A talk, lasting several minutes, followed.

"Now then, you come with us," said Dan Baxter to the Rovers. "And see to it that you don't try to get away."

"Where do you want us to go?" asked Tom.

"We are going to try to find your brother," was the bully's smooth reply.

"Humph! Do you expect us to believe that?"

"You can suit yourself, Tom Rover. But, just the same, you'll come along."

"And if we refuse?" put in Sam.

"I'll hammer you into submission."

"By jinks! but you always were a cheerful brute, Baxter," cried Sam.

"Shut up and come along," growled the bully.

Feeling it would be folly to resist, the two Rovers moved off with the party. The big guide led the way and the others followed.

"You may as well earn your salt," observed Baxter. "Here, take hold and pull one of the sleds."

He placed the rope in their hands and compelled them to haul the load, which they did unwillingly enough.

Curious as it may seem, none of the Baxter party had given a thought to the sled which Sam and Tom had had with them, and this had been left under the bushes at the spot where Husty had discovered the Rovers.

At first Tom and Sam had thought to speak about the matter, but they finally decided it would be better to run the risk of losing that portion of the outfit entirely than to place it in the hands of their enemy.

The way was rough, and it was only with the greatest of difficulty that they could drag the sleds along. But less than half an hour brought them to the spot which Bill Harney had in mind—a grand and wild place, where the mountain appeared to split in two for a distance of several hundred feet. Here there was a gorge fifty or sixty feet deep, partly choked with small scrub cedars.

"There's the hole," said Harney, advancing into the gorge and pointing with his hand.

"Better go ahead and see if it is free of bears or other wild animals," suggested Dan Baxter, as he came to a halt.

Rifle in hand the guide went into the opening, and made a thorough examination of the surroundings.

"Aint been no b'ars nor nothin' else here," he declared. "You can come right in."

The opening on one side of the gully was an irregular one, and beyond this was a large cave having several chambers. All was pitch dark in the inner chambers, and they lit some brushwood to give them light. Then a regular fire was started, which did much toward making the surroundings warmer and more cheerful.

Dan Baxter and his friends were hungry, and lost no time in preparing a meal. Tom and Sam were led to one side of an inner chamber, and the rope fastened to their hands was bound tightly to the protruding roots of a tree.

"Now, don't you attempt to escape," said Baxter. "If you do—well, you'll wish you hadn't, that's all."

And then he rejoined his companions in the outer chamber, leaving poor Tom and Sam to their misery.

CHAPTER XXII.

JASPER GRINDER TRIES TO MAKE TERMS.

"Well, Tom, this looks as if we had put our foot into it," was Sam's comment, delivered in a whisper.

"Don't despair, Sam," said his brother cheerfully. "We have been in worse holes, remember, and always managed to escape with a whole skin."

"That's true, but I don't see how we are going to get away now. I suppose somebody will stand on guard all the time."

"Perhaps Dick and Mr. Barrow will come to the rescue."

"If they can find the way. The wind and snow will cover the trail pretty well."

"There's no use of crying over the affair. If we can break away, I'll be for doing so."

"So will I."

"Hi, you stop your talking in there!" shouted Dan Baxter. "Plotting to run away, I reckon. It won't do you any good. If you try it, somebody will get a dose of buckshot in the leg."

"You don't mean to say you're going to stop our talking," said Tom, in indignation.

"That's just what I do mean to say. Now stop—or go hungry."

As the Rovers did not wish to starve, they relapsed into silence. A meal was being prepared by the Baxter party, and the appetizing odors floated into the inner chamber, where Tom and Sam sniffed them eagerly, for the walk and the bracing air had given them an appetite.

"Smells good, don't it?" remarked Dan Baxter, as he came in, fire-brand in hand, and confronted Tom.

"What, the cave?" asked Tom carelessly.

"No, the grub."

"Oh, you are cooking something, aren't you?"

"You know well enough that we are."

"Well, I can't stop you, Baxter, so cook away."

"Don't you want something to eat?"

"To be sure we do," put in Sam. "Nobody wants to go hungry."

"Perhaps you'll have to go hungry," said Dan Baxter significantly.

"It would be just like you to starve us, Baxter!" burst out Tom. "I know you are as mean as they make them."

"No compliments, please. I know my business, Tom Rover; and let me say I am in this game to win."

"I don't see what that has to do with our eating."

"You will see presently. I know all about what brought you here."

"And we know what brought you here," put in Sam.

"I suppose you fellows have a map, or something like it," went on Baxter, after a pause, during which he gazed curiously first at Tom and then at the youngest Rover.

"A map of what?" demanded Tom.

"A map whereby to find that treasure."

"If we have a map we'll take good care to keep it to ourselves," came from Sam, before he had taken time to think twice.

"Ha! then you have a map!" And now Dan Baxter's eyes brightened. "Where is it?"

"I didn't say so."

"I'll search you," said the bully, and at once proceeded to turn out one pocket after another. Of course the map, being in Dick's possession, was not found.

"You got it hidden," said Baxter sourly. "Tell we where it is, or you shall have nothing to eat."

"Will you give us a good meal if we do tell you?" demanded Tom promptly.

"Yes."

"Honor bright?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, Dick has the only map we possess." And Tom grinned, while Sam had all he could do to keep from laughing outright.

Instantly Dan Baxter's face grew dark, and he drew back his hand as if to strike Tom.

"You're a fresh one!" he burst out. "Are you telling me the truth?"

"I am. He has the map, and I reckon he'll keep it. Now, if it's all the same to you, we'll take that meal. Eh, Sam?"

"I'm hungry enough."

"I shan't give you a mouthful!" roared Baxter. "You can't play any game on me."

"That shows what your promise is worth, Baxter," returned Tom. "I didn't expect much else, though, for I know you thoroughly. Still, we told you nothing but the truth."

With a face full of hatred Dan Baxter turned on his heel and left them. Presently they heard him sit down with the others, and all began to eat the food that had been cooking.

"I must say we didn't gain much," observed Tom gloomily. "I suppose I ought to have humored him, in order to get something. But I despise him so I can't help pitching into him."

"I wouldn't humor him—I'd starve first!" returned Sam earnestly. "I am glad we weren't carrying the map."

"So am I glad. Rather than give it to him, I would have chewed it up and swallowed it."

Half an hour went by, during which both boys said but little, each being busy trying to concoct some scheme by which they might escape. They heard the others talking in low voices, but were unable to catch what was said.

Presently Jasper Grinder came in, bringing with him a small portion of food and a kettle of water. Setting the things on a rock, he untied one hand of each of the boys, that they might eat and drink.

"This is a fine meal," said Tom sarcastically.

"It is more than you deserve," replied the former teacher of Putnam Hall.

"You always were a hard one, Grinder."

"Mr. Grinder, if you please," said the man pointedly.

"And if I don't please to call you Mister?"

"Then you will get nothing more from me."

"Do you know that you are playing a high game here, keeping us prisoners?" asked Sam.

"What we are doing is our business." Jasper Grinder paused for a moment. "I want you to tell me something of that treasure for which you are seeking," he went on.

"What do you want to know?" asked Tom.

"What is the treasure worth?"

"We can't tell that until it is found."

"You are quite sure it has never been removed?"

"How can we be sure, when we don't know anything about it."

"Baxter says your brother Dick has a map."

"Hasn't Baxter a map, too?" questioned Sam.

"Something of a map, yes, but it is not very complete."

"I'm glad to hear that," said Tom quickly.

"But Baxter claims the treasure for himself."

"Really?" said Sam sarcastically. "Well, let him claim what he pleases. If we find it, it will belong to us—don't forget that."

Again there was a pause. Jasper Grinder looked anxiously toward the outer cave, to see if Baxter or the guide were watching him. But the two were talking earnestly between themselves.

"I have a plan," began the former teacher of Putnam Hall, in a low voice, "a plan to aid you."

"What plan?" demanded Tom.

"Hush! not so loud—or they may hear you. I presume you know what sort of a fellow Baxter is?"

"Well, rather," said Sam dryly.

"He is planning to do you a great deal of harm. Now I think I can save you."

"Then save us," said Tom. "Or untie us, and we will save ourselves."

"You can't save yourselves. Baxter is strong, and that guide is a giant in strength."

"What do you propose?"

"I'm coming to that. But you must make me a promise first."

"What promise?"

"That half that treasure shall be mine when it is found."

"Half!" cried Tom and Sam together.

"Yes."

"We can't promise that," went on Tom.

"You don't want much," was Sam's comment.

"Isn't it worth something to be saved from Baxter's clutches? I overheard him tell the guide what troubles he had had with you in the past, and how you had been the means of sending his father to prison, and all that. Why, he would put you out of the way forever, if he could."

"And will you stand by, Jasper Grinder, and see that done?" asked Tom.

"No! no! But—but—he is his own master. Promise what I wish, and I will help you."

"We can't promise you half the treasure," said Tom flatly. "But if you will really help us, we'll promise that you shall lose nothing by the transaction."

At this instant Dan Baxter leaped to his feet and ran for his gun, while Bill Harney and Lemuel Husty did the same.

"Come out here, Grinder!" shouted the bully. "Somebody or some wild animal is around!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BLACK BEAR.

"Somebody is coming!" ejaculated Sam. "I hope it is Dick, with Mr. Barrow!"

"So do I," returned Tom.

Without saying a word more, Jasper Grinder ran from the inner cave and joined Baxter and the guide. His face was pale, and he was evidently much disturbed.

Soon Baxter and his party were outside, and the Rover boys heard them moving up and down the gully. Several minutes passed, and then came a gunshot, followed by another.

"I hope they are not firing on Dick or Mr. Barrow," said Sam, with something of a shudder.

"I guess not," returned his brother. "If they were, we'd probably hear shots in return."

An hour went by, and then Dan Baxter and the others came back, the guide carrying several rabbits and a large fox. The rabbits were skinned and kept for eating, and the fox was skinned and the carcass thrown away.

Tom and Sam had expected Jasper Grinder to return to them, but if the former teacher desired to do this, he was prevented by Dan Baxter, who kept his companions close by him, around the fire.

Slowly the time went by until darkness was upon them. The fire was kept up, but Baxter screened it as much as possible, so that the glare might not penetrate to the forest beyond the gully and prove a beacon to guide Dick and John Barrow to the spot.

The boys were tired out, and soon Sam sank to sleep, with his hands still tied to the tree roots. Tom tried to keep awake, but half an hour later he, too, was in dreamland.

When the Rovers awoke it was not yet morning. All was dark around them, for the fire had burnt low. Sam roused up first, with a severe pain in his wrists and ankles, where his bonds were cutting him.

"Oh, my wrists!" he groaned, and his voice caused Tom to start.

"Is that you, Sam?"

"Yes. My wrists are almost cut in two!"

"The same here. I've slept like a rock, too."

"Is it morning yet?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"What's going on in there?" came from Dan Baxter, as he leaped to his feet and caught up a gun.

"We are suffering from cuts of the ropes," said Tom. "It was an outrage to compel us to sleep in this fashion, tied up like mummies!"

"Oh, shut up!" growled Baxter, and then began to poke the fire. Soon it was blazing as readily as before, and then the light found its way into the inner cave, so that Sam and Tom could see each other once more.

Breakfast for the two prisoners was a slim affair of crackers, rabbits' bones, and water. Tom asked for coffee, but Baxter would not give it to them.

"You'll get no luxuries from me," growled the bully. "Be thankful that you aren't being starved."

While they were eating, Baxter and his companions held a low, but animated, conversation. "We'll try it, anyway," Tom heard Baxter say, and that was all the Rovers heard. As soon as the meal was finished the party took up some of their traps and their firearms.

"Now, then, we are going out for a while," said Dan Baxter, coming up to the prisoners. "Take my advice and don't try to escape in the meantime. If you do, and we catch you, it will go hard with you; let me tell you that!"

"Are you going to leave us tied up?" questioned Tom dubiously.

"Certainly."

"Some wild animal may come in here and chew us up."

"We'll leave the fire burning—that will keep 'em away," returned the bully.

He would say no more, and in a few minutes he and his companions were gone and the Rover boys were left to themselves.

"Now what?" asked Sam, after all had been silent for at least ten minutes.

"Don't ask me," replied Tom disconsolately. "We're in a pickle, and no mistake. Are your hands as tight as ever?"

"Yes, and my wrists hurt so I feel like screaming with pain."

"Baxter is a brute, if ever there was one. However, I think I can get my left hand free," went on Tom suddenly.

"Good, Tom! Do so by all means."

Tom worked away with vigor. The pain was intense, but he bore it manfully. At last his hand was free.

"Hurrah! so far so good!" he cried lowly. "Now for the other hand."

But this was not so easy, for the knots were hard ones and broke his finger nails dread-fully.

"If only I could get at them with my teeth," he observed, "I'd soon chew them apart."

But he could not bend around, and so had to content himself with working away as before. Soon his fingers grew numb and he had to desist.

"Too bad, but I can't make it!" he groaned.

"Wait a while and give your fingers a rest," returned Sam.

He had begun work on his own fetters, but try his best could make no material progress. The ropes had cut through the skin in two places and from these spots the blood was flowing freely.

Two hours went by, and to the boys it seemed an age. Tom had tried his best to free himself, and now the cords were gradually loosening up.

"I've got it at last!" he cried presently. "Just wait." And a little later the bonds dropped to the ground. But the work had caused his finger tips to bleed.

With his hands free, Tom set to work free his feet, and this was not so difficult, although it also took time. Both boys were now hungry once more, and reckoned that it was well past the noon hour.

"I'll set you free, and then we'll look around for something to eat," said Tom.

"Hadn't we better get out as soon as we can?" asked his brother. "Remember, they may come back at any moment, and we are no match for them."

"It will take but a minute to pick up something, if it's around, Sam. Besides, we have got to have something in our stomachs before we set off to hunt up Dick and Mr. Barrow."

As soon as Sam was freed they ran to the outer cave. Here, on some tree-roots overhead, hung a number of traps, including a knapsack containing crackers and cheese, and close by it was a portion of rabbit, left over from the morning repast.

"Just what we want!" cried Tom. "Now, if we only had a gun——"

He broke off short, as a crashing outside greeted their ears. The noise continued several seconds, then ceased abruptly.

"What do you suppose that was?" questioned Sam. "It can't be our enemies returning."

"No, I think it was some wild animal—perhaps a wildcat."

Both looked around for some weapon with which to defend themselves, and Sam caught sight of a double-barreled shotgun standing in a corner of the cave. He ran for this, and as he did so the crashing outside was continued.

"I see something under the brushwood!" whispered Tom, peeping out. "Something big and black."

"It's a bear!" cried Sam, a minute later. "A black bear! And he is coming this way!"

Both boys were astonished and bewildered, for they had not been looking for such a big beast as this. Sam clutched the shotgun tightly, while Tom ran to the fire and picked up the biggest brand he could hold.

The bear advanced to the center of the gully and looked up and down suspiciously. Then he sniffed the air.

"He smells the carcass of the fox that lies outside," whispered Tom.

"Well, he must smell us, too, Tom. It's a wonder he doesn't run. Mr. Barrow said bears up here were generally shy."

"I reckon he is pretty hungry. Here he comes for the fox meat now."

Tom was right. The bear was advancing with great care, sniffing the snow-covered ground at every step. Once or twice he raised his head, as if preparing to run at the first sign of alarm.

"I'd like to bring him down!" whispered Sam.

"You can't do it with the shotgun, Sam. Be quiet! We can be thankful if he takes the fox meat and leaves us alone."

At last the bear reached the carcass. The two boys expected he would snatch it up instantly and run away, but they were mistaken. The bear sniffed it from end to end, and walked all around it.

"He's afraid of a trap, or something like that," whispered Tom. "They are pretty cute."

At last the bear seemed satisfied, and he took the carcass up in his mouth and started to walk off with it. But, instead of turning up or down the gully, he came closer to the cave!

"My gracious, he's coming this way!" cried Sam. "Look out, Tom!"

His voice was so loud that the black bear heard it plainly. The beast immediately dropped the fox meat and stood up on his hind legs. Then he gave a roar of disappointment; thinking, probably, that the boys had set a bait to catch him.

"He don't like the situation," began Tom, when he gave a yell and clutched his brother by the arm. And small wonder, for with rapid strides the black bear was making for them, as though to chew them both up!

CHAPTER XXIV.

TOGETHER AGAIN.

It must be confessed that both Tom and Sam were much alarmed by the forward move of the black bear. Up to this instant they had trusted the beast would depart with the fox's carcass, without discovering them. Now it looked as if they were in for a hot fight, and that without delay.

"Get behind the fire!" cried Tom, as soon as he could collect his thoughts.

Sam had the shotgun pointed, and as the bear advanced he pulled the trigger. The charge of shot entered the bear's left shoulder, making a number of painful, but not dangerous, wounds. At once the beast let out a snort of commingled pain and rage.

"You've done it now," came from Tom, and whirled his firebrand, to make it blaze up. "Take a stick, quick!"

Instead of doing this, however, Sam fired a second time, this time hitting the bear in the left hind leg. The beast dropped on all fours and came to a halt while yet twenty yards from them.

By this time Tom had another firebrand, and this he compelled his brother to take, the shotgun being now empty. There was no time to reload the piece, and indeed, neither of the boys knew where to look for ammunition.

More enraged than ever, the bear now advanced again, until only the fire was between him and his intended victims. He had now forgotten about the fox meat, and thought only of getting at the human being who had injured him. He arose once more and let out a loud roar, while his small eyes gleamed maliciously. Had the fire not been in the way he would have rushed upon Sam without further hesitation.

The pulling out of the two large firebrands was causing the fire to burn low, something which was in the bear's favor. The boys almost expected to see the

beast leap over the spot, but bruin knew better than to attempt this. He began to circle around the flames, and as he did this, the boys did likewise.

"Shall we run?" panted Sam. He was so agitated he could scarcely speak.

"No—stick to the fire," returned Tom. "Bears hate that. Look out!"

The bear had now started to come around the other way. At once the boys shifted again, until they occupied the position where they had stood when the beast was first discovered. Then the bear dropped down once more, and eyed them in a meditative way.

"He is making up his mind about the next move," said Tom. "I'll try him with something new." And at the risk of burning his hand, he picked up some small brushwood which was blazing fiercely and threw it at their enemy.

The effect was as surprising as it was gratifying. The burning brands struck the beast fairly on the nose, causing him to leap back in terror. Then he uttered a grunt of dissatisfaction, turned, and sped, with clumsy swiftness, up the gully and into the forest beyond.

"He is retreating!" cried Sam joyfully.

"Wait—don't be too sure," returned Tom, and, firebrands still in hand, they watched until the bear was out of sight and they could hear nothing more of him.

"My, but aint I glad he's gone!" said the youngest Rover, with a sigh of relief.

"So am I glad, Sam. I was almost afraid both of us were doomed to be chewed up."

"What shall we do next?"

"I guess we had better get out—as soon as you've reloaded the gun. Wonder where the ammunition is?"

Both instituted a search, and soon a box was brought to light, containing not only ammunition, but also a big hunting knife.

"I'll appropriate the knife," said Tom. "It's not as good as a gun or pistol, but it is better than nothing."

Thus armed they set forth without further delay, fearful that their enemies might return at any moment to recapture them. As the bear had gone up the gully they went down, and they did not come to a halt until they had placed at least quarter of a mile between themselves and the caves. For some distance they kept on a series of bare rocks, thus leaving no trail behind.

"I reckon we are clear of them for the time being," observed Tom, as he came to a halt. "And that being so, the next question is Where are Dick and Mr. Barrow?"

"The best we can do is to try to find Perch River, to my way of thinking," came from Sam. "If we can find that and we stick to it, we'll be sure to land at Bear Pond, sooner or later."

"It seems to me Bear Pond ought to be close at hand," said Tom. "We've seen the bear anyway, if not the pond." And at this both Sam and he gave a short laugh.

An hour later found them tramping along the edge of a cliff overlooking a broad valley, in the center of which was a winding stream almost hidden by the woods on either side.

"Now, if we were only sure that was Perch River, we'd be all right," said Sam. "But unfortunately all rivers look pretty much alike up here."

"We might as well go down to it, anyway," answered his brother. "It's pretty cold up here."

Finding a break in the cliff they descended, and started through the woods for the watercourse. It was indeed cold, and only their brisk walking kept them warm. A stiff wind was rising, and overhead the branches swayed mournfully.

When they reached the river they came to another halt, not knowing which was up and which was down.

"Guess we had better chop a hole in the ice and see how the water is flowing," suggested Sam.

"Let us walk in this direction," said Tom. "I think this is right, and, anyway, we may soon come to an air-hole, which will save us the trouble of cutting an opening."

As they advanced they had kept a sharp lookout for the Baxter crowd, but so far none of their enemies had put in an appearance.

"Hurrah!" suddenly shouted Tom. "Here's a signal of some sort!"

He pointed ahead, to where Dick and John Barrow had planted their first signal pole. Both made a rush forward, and soon had the cooked meat which had been tied in a cloth and the note pinned on the outside.

"A letter from Dick," said Tom, and read it aloud. "We are on the right track, Sam, and if we only continue to steer clear of Dan Baxter and his gang we'll be safe."

"Dick asks us to fire two shots, a minute apart, as a signal," came from Sam. "I'll do it at once." And without delay he discharged the shotgun, waited sixty seconds, and then discharged it again.

Both listened intently, and from a great distance came back two other shots, also a minute apart.

"They heard the signal!" ejaculated Sam joyfully. "It came from up the river, didn't it?"

"Yes; come on!"

Without stopping to eat the food which had been left for them, the boys hurried forward just as rapidly as their now tired legs would carry them.

They had brought their skates along and these were put on, after which progress was easier. It was now growing dark, and they began to wonder if they would be able to rejoin Dick and Mr. Barrow before nightfall.

"I hope we meet them," said Sam. "I've no fancy for remaining in this open, alone."

"Try another two shots," suggested Tom, after an hour had gone by, and Sam did so. Immediately came answering reports, directly to their left.

"Hullo!" yelled Tom, at the top of his lungs, and Sam at once took up the cry.

"Hullo!" came back faintly. "Tom! Sam! Is that you?"

"Yes. We are on the river!"

"All right!"

The yelling now stopped, and Tom and Sam came to a halt and sat down on a flat rock to wait. Ten minutes passed, when they saw Dick rush into a clearing, followed by John Barrow. As soon as the eldest Rover saw them he waved his hand enthusiastically.

"Where in the world have you been?" came from Dick, as soon as he reached them, and saw that neither was injured. "We've been looking high and low for you."

"We've been prisoners of the enemy," answered Tom. "By the way, have you seen anything of Dan Baxter and his party?"

"No. Do you mean to say Baxter made you prisoners?"

"He and his crowd did."

"How many are there with him?"

"Three men, Bill Harney the guide, Lemuel Husty, and Jasper Grinder."

"Jasper Grinder!" burst out Dick. "Impossible!"

"It is true, Dick. I was as much astonished as you."

"I suppose Baxter promised him a share of the treasure if it was found."

"More than likely. But I don't believe they'll find the treasure."

Tom and Sam soon told their story, to which Dick and John Barrow listened with keen interest. Hardly, however, was the tale finished than the guide urged them to move on.

"It's quite a few miles to camp," he said. "And, unless I am mistaken, it's getting ready for a big fall o' snow."

John Barrow was right about the snow. Less than quarter of an hour later the thick flakes began to fall. Then came a finer snow, which the wind blew around them like so much hard salt.

"We are in for a corker!" cried the guide. "The sooner we git back to our supplies the better it will be for us!"

CHAPTER XXV.

SNOWED IN.

With the coming of night the downfall of snow increased until it was impossible to see a dozen feet in any direction. The wind also increased in fury until it blew a regular gale. At first this was in their favor, being directly on their backs and sending them over the ice at a furious pace, but soon it shifted, first to the left and then to in front of them, and now further progress appeared out of the question.

"I'm afraid we can't make it!" gasped Dick, turning to catch his breath. "I'm almost winded now."

"I've got to stop," came from Sam. "I'm ready to drop."

"I can't see a thing," said Tom. "And I'm in mortal terror of skating into some big air-hole."

"You are right, lads, we'll have to give up the idea of reaching camp to-night," came from John Barrow seriously. "But where to take you to out of this awful storm I scarcely know."

"Any kind of shelter will do," said Sam. "We can rig up a hut under some big cedar tree."

"In that case, let us stick as closely to the river as possible."

"Why?"

"We can get fish then, if we need 'em."

No more was said, and the guide at once led the way to a thick clump of cedars growing but a rod away from the edge of the river. The cedars formed something of a circle, about fifteen feet in diameter, and by clearing out some brushwood in the center they made quite a cozy resting place. On the outside the cedars were laced together, and the snow was banked up on all sides,

leaving but one opening, two feet wide and several feet high, for the purpose of supplying them with fresh air.

By the time the shelter was ready for use all the boys were so fagged out they could scarcely stand. Dick and the guide had brought blankets with them, and one of these was placed over the opening temporarily, to keep out a large part of the wind. Then a candle was lit and John Barrow burnt up a little brushwood, "jest to take the chill outer the place," as he explained. They did not dare to let the flames grow too high for fear of setting fire to the cedars themselves.

As the boys lay on the brushwood resting, they heard the wind outside increasing in violence, and saw the cedars bend to and fro, and listened to them creak dismally.

"Mr. Barrow, how long do you reckon this storm will last?" questioned Tom.

"There is no tellin', lad. Perhaps through the night, an' perhaps for a couple o' days."

"If it lasts two days, we'll be snowed in for keeps!" came from Sam.

The guide shrugged his shoulders. "True, Sam, but we've got to take what comes."

"Let us take account of our provisions," said Dick. "If there is any prospect of our being snowed in we'll have to eat sparingly, or run the risk of being starved to death."

There was not much to count up: some meat and crackers Dick and the guide had brought along, and the meat, crackers, and the rabbit in Tom and Sam's store. In his pockets John Barrow also carried some coffee, sugar, and some salt.

"Not such a very small lot," was Dick's comment. "But it might be more."

A scanty evening meal was quickly disposed of, and then the candle was blown out, and all retired to rest. The boys were soon sound asleep, and presently the guide followed, but with his hand on his gun, ready for any attack by man or beast, should it come.

The night passed quietly enough, for presently the wind went down. The snow grew thicker than ever, until it covered the river to a depth of two feet and more. Around the cedars there was a huge drift, burying the shelter completely.

It was Dick who roused up first, to find all pitch-dark around him. Bringing out a match, he lit the candle and looked at his watch.

"Seven o'clock!" he murmured. "Guess I'll go out and see what the weather is."

Stretching himself, he walked to the blanket which had been placed over the opening, and tried to thrust it aside. At once a mass of snow came tumbling down and sifted in all directions, a good share on Tom's face.

"Hi! who's washing my face with snow?" cried Tom, as he opened his eyes and sat up. "That's a mean trick, Dick, on a fellow who is dead tired out."

"I didn't mean to do it, Tom. I was going outside, to see how the weather is. I reckon the snow is pretty deep."

The talking aroused the guide and Sam, and soon all were on their feet. The snow in the opening was pushed back and they forced their way outside, to find themselves in a drift up to their waists.

"Gosh, but we are right in it!" was Tom's comment. "See, the river is completely covered. That settles skating."

"And the worst of it is, it is still snowing," came from Dick.

"With no signs of letting up," finished John Barrow. "Boys, I am afraid we are snowed in, or snowed up, just as you feel like calling it."

"Do you mean we'll have to remain here?" questioned Sam quickly.

"For the present. We are a good four miles from the pond, and we can't tramp that in this storm."

The wind was rising again, with a dull moaning through the timber, and sending the flakes whirling in all directions, and they were glad enough to get back to the shelter of the cedars.

"We'll clear a space in the snow and start a fire," said the guide. "A hot cup o' coffee will do us all good."

"And we can cook that other rabbit Tom and I brought along," put in Sam.

Brushwood was handy, and Tom helped to cut some of this with the hunting knife he had brought along. Soon a lively blaze was warming them up, and water was boiling for the coffee, while the rabbit was cleaned, and broiled on a long fork in the guide's outfit. Crackers were running low, and they had but two apiece.

"I'll try fishing as soon as I'm done," said John Barrow, and was as good as his word.

It was no easy task to cut a hole through the ice, but once this was accomplished the fish were found to be lively enough, despite the storm and the cold. Inside of an hour they had a mess of nine, sufficient to last them for several meals. And while the others were fishing, Dick caught sight of a flock of birds, and brought down three.

"There, we won't starve yet awhile," said Dick, as he began to clean his game.

"That's true," answered Tom, "although we may get pretty tired of birds and fish before we get out of here and strike something different."

"I wonder how the Baxter crowd is faring," said Sam. "Unless they got back to the cave they can't be having a very good time of it."

"They don't deserve a good time of it," grumbled Tom. "They deserve to suffer."

"Bill Harney is a good enough guide to know what to do," put in John Barrow. "He will pull them through somehow—that is, if he knows enough to remain sober."

They had hoped that the storm would let up by noon, but twelve o'clock found the snow coming down as fast as ever, blotting out the landscape on every hand. Outside of the moaning of the wind all was as silent as a tomb.

There was but a little for the boys to do, and after the fishing was over they were glad enough to take it easy in the shelter and listen to several stories John Barrow had to tell. The guide also related what he knew concerning Goupert and the various hunts made for the missing treasure.

"He must have been a fierce sort of a man in his day," observed Dick. "I don't wonder the most of the folks in this region were content to leave him alone."

It was almost nightfall when the snow stopped coming down, and then it was too dark to attempt the journey to Bear Pond.

"We'll have to make another night of it here," said John Barrow. "Then, if it's clear, we can start for the pond early in the morning."

"Hark!" cried Tom, rousing up. "Did you hear that?"

"Hear what?" came from the others.

"I thought I heard somebody calling."

All listened. For a few seconds silence reigned, then came an uncertain sound from a considerable distance.

"There it is!"

"That's somebody calling, sure," said the guide. "Must be down along the river. I'll go out an' look."

"Can I go along?" asked Dick. "You may want help—if somebody is in trouble."

"All right. Bring your gun with you."

In another minute they had started out, each with his gun, and with his trouser legs tied up with bits of cord, to keep the deep snow from reaching up to their boot-tops. Their course was directly for the river.

It was so dark they could see little or nothing, saving the whiteness which spread in all directions.

"Hullo! hullo!" yelled John Barrow, when the river was gained.

"Help!" came back faintly. "Help!"

"Somebody over thar!" said the guide, and pointed a short distance up the stream. "Guess he's in a peck o' trouble, too."

He started in the direction, and Dick came close behind. The party in distress was a man, whose cries for aid were gradually becoming weaker and weaker. Before they reached the individual his voice ceased entirely.

"He has fainted from exhaustion," said John Barrow, as he reached the wayfarer.

"Why, it's Jasper Grinder, our old teacher," ejaculated Dick.

The eldest Rover was right. The unfortunate man was indeed the former teacher of Putnam Hall, but so pinched and haggard as to be scarcely recognized. He had fallen on a bare rock, and this had cut open his left cheek, from which the blood was flowing.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN UNWELCOME COMRADE.

"He's in a bad way, that's certain," was Dick's comment, as he surveyed the prostrate form. Even though Jasper Grinder was an enemy, he could not help but feel sorry for the man.

"We must get him up to our shelter as soon as possible," replied John Barrow. "It is easy to see he is half frozen—and maybe starved."

"Shall we carry him?"

"We'll have to; there is no other way."

Slinging their guns across their backs, they raised up the form of the unconscious man. He was a dead weight, and to carry him through that deep snow was no light task. Less than half the distance to the shelter was covered when Dick called a halt.

"I'll have to rest up!" he gasped. "He weighs a ton."

But in a few minutes he resumed the journey, and now they did not stop with their load until the shelter was reached. Tom and Sam were watching for them.

"Jasper Grinder, by all that's wonderful!" burst out Tom.

"Was he alone?" questioned Sam.

"He was, so far as we could see," answered Dick. "I can tell you, he's almost a case for an undertaker."

This remark made everyone feel sober, and while the two younger Rovers stirred up the fire, Dick and the guide did all in their power to bring the unconscious man to his senses. Some hot coffee was poured down his throat, and his hands and back were vigorously rubbed.

"Oh!" came faintly, at last, and Jasper Grinder slowly opened his eyes, "Oh!"

"Take it easy, Mr. Grinder," said Dick kindly. "You are safe now."

"But the bear! Where is the bear?" murmured the dazed man.

"There is no bear here."

"He is after me! He wants to chew me up!"

With this Jasper Grinder relapsed into unconsciousness once more.

"I reckon a b'ar chased him and he lost his reckonin'," was John Barrow's comment. "Bring him up to the fire. He wants warmin'."

Yet, with all the care they were able to bestow, it was a good hour before Jasper Grinder was able to sit up and relate what had occurred to him. He was very hungry, and eagerly disposed of every scrap of food they had to offer him.

"I have been lost in the timber since yesterday," he said. "Oh, it was awful, the wind and the snow, and the intense cold. Sometimes I could not feel my feet, and I knew I was freezing to death. And I hadn't a mouthful to eat!"

"But where are the others?" questioned Dick.

"I don't know—back to that cave, I suppose. We were out looking for some trace of—ahem—of Tom and Sam, when I became separated from the others. Then, in trying to find my way back to the cave, I fell in with a big black bear. The ugly creature came after me, and I ran for my life, through the brushwood and the snow, until I came to a cliff. I fell over this, landed on an icy slope, and rolled and rolled until I struck the river. Then I got up and tried to get back to the cave, but it was out of the question. I found an opening in the cliff, on going back, and remained there until morning, when that bear, or another like him, roused me and caused me another roll down to the river."

"Didn't the bear follow you?" asked Tom.

"He followed as far as the river. But I ran with all my might through the deep snow, and presently he gave up the pursuit. Then I went on and on until I happened to catch a glimpse of your camp-fire, and set up a cry for help. I

slipped on a rock and hit my cheek, and the loss of blood and the shock made me dizzy. The next I knew I was here."

"You may be thankful that we found you and brought you in," was the remark made by John Barrow. "If you had remained out there this night, you'd 'a' been a corpse by mornin', sure!"

"I suppose that's true," said Jasper Grinder, with a thoughtful look. His experience had humbled him greatly. He was so exhausted that he soon fell asleep, breathing heavily. The boys and John Barrow gazed at him curiously.

"His being with us presents a problem," said Dick. "What are we to do with him?"

"I'm sure I don't want him along," answered Sam promptly. He had hot forgotten the treatment received at Putnam Hall.

"None of us want him, I take it, Sam. But we can't leave him behind to starve. And I doubt if he can find his way back to the Baxter camp alone."

"No, he can't do that," put in the guide. "It is easy to see he knows nothing of the woods and mountains. He was a fool to come here."

"If we take him along, we ought to make him do his share of the work," said Tom. "But I don't like it. He'll be forever spying on us, and if we find that treasure he'll try to get it away, mark my words."

"The only thing we can do is to watch him, and not let him have any gun or pistol," said Dick. "He won't dare to leave us, unarmed, especially if we tell him of all the wild animals that are around."

The subject was discussed for fully an hour, but no satisfactory conclusion was reached, and presently one after another dropped off to sleep; the guide being the last to lie down, after fixing the camp-fire for the night, so that a share of the warmth might drift into the shelter.

On the following day the sun came up bright and clear. It was still bitterly cold, and they were loath to leave the vicinity of the camp-fire. But John Barrow urged that they make good use of the clear weather, and so they started up the river as soon as they had disposed of their breakfast of fish and birds.

"To be sure I'll go along, if I can walk," was what Jasper Grinder said on being questioned, "I wouldn't remain behind alone for a fortune, and I am sure I can't find the Baxter party now. Please don't cast me off! It wouldn't be human!"

"I believe you'd cast us off, if we were in a similar situation," was Tom's comment. "The way you treated Sam at the Hall shows that you don't care how some folks suffer. But you can go along, for we are not brutes. But you've got to be careful how you behave, or otherwise out you go, to shift for yourself, no matter how cold it is or how many wild animals are around."

"I will do nothing that does not meet with the approval of all of you," answered the former teacher humbly. "And remember, Thomas, I was willing to aid you when you were a prisoner in the cave in the gully."

"You were—for a big consideration," returned Tom dryly. "Let me tell you flatly, I don't take much stock in your so-called generosity."

They were soon on the way, straight down to the river and then up that stream. John Barrow was in the lead, with Sam following. Jasper came next, and Tom and Dick brought up the rear. As far as possible the guide sought out a trail along the timber, where the snow was not so deep. Here and there were bare spots, but at other places were deep drifts, where they frequently got in up to their armpits.

"This is no joke!" gasped Sam, after floundering through an extra deep drift. "I thought I was going out of sight that time."

"I trust we haven't much further to go," was Jasper Grinder's comment. "I would give a hundred dollars to be back at Timber Run."

"It's your own fault you are here," retorted Sam.

"I might say the same of you," returned the former teacher sharply.

By noon John Barrow calculated they had covered half the distance to Bear Pond. A sheltered nook was found between some rocks and trees, and here they set fire to a mass of brushwood, that they might get warm while they rested, and ate the last of the food on hand. There was no wind, and the sun,

shining as brightly as ever, made the surface of the snow glitter like diamonds.

"I hope we find our stores at the cache undisturbed," said Dick, while resting. "I am hungry for a change of diet. As soon as we get there I'm going to make some biscuits and boil some beans."

"Gosh, but a plateful of beans would be fine!" cried Tom. "I can tell you what," he added reflectively; "you want to do without things to learn their real value."

On they went once more, this time slower than before, because both Sam and Jasper Grinder showed great signs of weariness. They had to move around a long bend of the stream, and for fear of getting into a deep drift the guide did not dare to make a short cut. They passed the pole set up by John Barrow and Dick at the forks of the stream, and then headed directly for where the cache was located.

"When we get settled we can put up a regular hut," said John Barrow. "Then we can be as comfortable, almost, as at home."

"I'm anxious to locate the treasure," said Tom, "We can—Gracious me! Look there!"

They had come in sight of the cache, and now beheld two great black bears standing over the loose stones, doing their best to scratch them away and get at the party's stores!

CHAPTER XXVII.

BRINGING DOWN TWO BEARS.

"Bears!" burst out Sam, and started back in alarm.

"Bears!" shrieked Jasper Grinder, and turned as pale as death. "Oh, somebody save me!" He wanted to run, but he was in such a tremble he could not, and sank on his knees in the snow in terror.

Crack! It was the report of John Barrow's rifle, and one of the bears was hit full in the left eye. Crack! went the piece Dick carried, and the other bear was hit in the neck. Then Tom fired the shotgun which had been found on Jasper Grinder, and the bear Dick had hit was wounded in the side.

Of course there followed a terrible uproar, and in a twinkle both bears left the pile of rocks and came toward those who had wounded them. The one that had been wounded in the eye was mortally hit, however, and staggered in a heap before he had gone ten paces.

But the second bear was full of fight, and his course was directly for Tom. Before the lad could run the beast was almost on top of him.

"Dodge him!" called out Dick. "Dodge him, Tom!"

"Shoot him, somebody!" yelled back Tom. "Shoot him, quick!"

And then he dodged behind some nearby brush. But the bear was almost as quick, and ran directly into the brushwood, to face him on the opposite side.

By this time John Barrow had the rifle reloaded, and now he skirted the brushwood, followed by Dick. Crack! went the rifle again, just as bruin was about to pounce upon Tom. But the bullet merely clipped the hair on the bear's back, and in a twinkle the beast was on Tom and had the lad down.

With his heart in his throat, Dick made a leap with the shotgun. Bang! went the piece, when he was not over three yards from the bear. The charge entered

the beast's ear, and with a snort he rolled over and over in the snow, sending it flying in every direction.

Freed of the bear, Tom lost no time in scrambling to his feet. Soon the struggles of the beast ceased, and they knew he was either dying or dead. To make sure, John Barrow stepped in, hunting knife in hand, and plunged the blade into his throat. Then the other bear was served in the same fashion.

The fight had been of short duration, yet the peril had been extreme, and after it was over poor Tom found he could scarcely stand. Dick led him to a rock and set him down, asking him if he was hurt.

"I got a scratch on the arm, but I reckon it's not much," was the faint answer. "But it was a close call, wasn't it?"

"Those bears must have been awfully hungry, or they wouldn't have put up such a fight," said the guide. "Their being at the cache proves they wanted food."

"Well, we've got the food now," returned Dick grimly. "We'll have all the bear steaks and roasts anybody wants."

"Yes, and I can tell you a juicy steak will just be boss!" put in Sam enthusiastically.

It was seen that Tom was hurt more than he cared to admit, and the others lost no time in building a big camp-fire, that they might warm themselves, while Dick took off his brother's coat, rolled up his shirt-sleeves, and bandaged an ugly scratch with a bit of linen.

"You can help here," said John Barrow to Jasper Grinder. "I'll fix it as your duty to keep the fire a-goin'. There is a hatchet and there is the brushwood. Don't let the fire go down, or I'm afraid there won't be enough heat for cooking your supper." And the guide smiled grimly.

At this indirect threat Jasper Grinder scowled. But he did not dare to complain, and was soon at work cutting brushwood and dragging it to the spot.

"Gosh, but he's not used to hard work," was Sam's whispered comment. "I'll wager he doesn't like that for a cent."

"It's time he was set to work doing something," answered Dick. "It will keep him from getting into mischief."

As late as it was, and although all were tired out from their long walk through the deep snow, they found it necessary to construct some shelter for the night. The guide located a number of cedars growing close together, and this spot was cleaned out and made as comfortable as circumstances permitted. The fire was shoved over to the new location, and then John Barrow cut up one of the bears and procured a big juicy steak for supper. It is needless to say that all enjoyed the treat set before them, even Jasper Grinder eating his full share.

"We'll hang the meat up on a tree," said John Barrow. "If we don't some hungry foxes or other wild animals will surely be after it." And procuring the necessary ropes, he flung them over some limbs and all hauled the carcasses up, Tom, of course, being excused from the task, because of his wounded arm.

The wind had gone down, and when all retired within the shelter not a sound but the merry crackling of the fire broke the stillness around them. In front of the camp was a long stretch of the pond, now thickly covered with snow; in the rear a slope of a mountain, rock-ribbed and covered with cedars and hemlock. To the left was located one of the branches of the river and a hundred yards distant was a second branch.

At first John Barrow had thought to set a guard for the night, but as the spot seemed free from danger for the time being, this was dispensed with, and all went to bed, to sleep soundly until sunrise.

"And now for the treasure hunt!" cried Sam, who was among the first to awaken. "It's just a perfect day, and we ought to accomplish a good deal, if we set to work right after breakfast."

He talked freely, for Jasper Grinder was still asleep—snoring lustily in a corner of the shelter. John Barrow was already outside, boiling coffee, broiling another bear steak, and preparing a pot of beans for cooking. He had likewise set some bread for raising.

"Goin' to give you a breakfast as is a breakfast," said the guide; with a broad smile. "Reckon all of you are ready for it, eh?"

"I am," said Dick. "Phew! but this mountain air does give one a tremendous appetite!"

While Jasper Grinder still slept Dick brought forth the precious map and studied the description, and also the translation of the French text into English, which Randolph Rover had made for them.

"'To find the box of silver and gold, go to where Bear Pond empties into Perch River,'" he read. "Well, we are at this spot, or, at least, at one of the spots. It may mean this branch, and it may mean one of several others."

"We can try one branch after another," put in Sam. "Go on with the description."

"'Ten paces to the west is a large pine tree which was once struck by lightning,'" continued Dick. He looked around. "I don't see any tree like that around here."

"You must remember, my lad, that that writin' was put down years ago," said John Barrow. "More'n likely if the tree was struck an' blasted, it's fallen long ago, and the spring freshets carried it down the river."

"That's true," said Sam, with a falling look. "But, anyway, we ought to be able to locate the stump."

"Yes, we ought to be able to do that."

"I'm going to locate it now," cried Sam, and stalked off to where the pond emptied into the stream. From this spot he stalked ten paces westward, and of a sudden disappeared from view.

"Help!" he cried.

"Hullo, Sam's disappeared!" cried Dick, and ran toward the spot.

"Look out!" sang out John Barrow. "There may be a nasty hole there!"

Nevertheless, he too went forward, and they soon beheld Sam floundering in snow up to his neck. He had stepped into a hollow between the rocks, and it took him some time to extricate himself from the unpleasant position.

"Oh, my, what a bath!" he exclaimed ruefully, as he tried to get the snow from out of his collar and his coat-sleeves. "I—I didn't think of a pitfall like that!"

"You want to be careful how you journey around here," cautioned John Barrow. "If that hollow had been twice as deep the snow might have smothered you to death."

"I will be careful," answered Sam. "I don't want any more snow down my back and up my coat-sleeves," and he hurried back to the camp-fire to warm himself.

By this time Tom was outside, and he was followed by Jasper Grinder, and presently all sat down close to the blaze to enjoy the generous breakfast the guide had provided. Tom said that his arm was a little stiff, but that otherwise he felt as well as ever.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TWO FAILURES.

What to do with Jasper Grinder was a problem which none of the boys knew how to solve. They were exceedingly sorry that he was among them, but as it would be impossible to send him off alone in that deep snow, they felt that they would have to make the best of the situation.

"I move we make him stay around the camp," suggested Tom. "He can watch our stores, keep the fire furnished with wood, and do some of the cooking."

"He may kick at playing servant girl," said Sam.

"If he kicks, let him clear out."

"I think Tom is right," put in Dick. "We don't want him along while we are trying to locate the treasure."

"He may slip away with our things—if he finds any trace of Baxter's party," went on Sam. "And we can't afford to lose anything more. One sled-load is enough. We'll be wanting some of those other things before long."

"I don't believe that other party is around here," said John Barrow. "We had better leave the man at the fire. We can keep our eyes open for the enemy—as you call 'em."

So it was arranged, and Dick told the former teacher. Jasper Grinder said but little in return, but asked about the possibility of any more wild beasts turning up.

"I don't want to be left alone to face another couple of bears," he said. "They would do their best to chew me up!"

"We will leave a gun in camp," said Dick. "If you see a bear coming, you can climb a tree and keep him off with the gun. If we hear a shot, we'll come back just as quickly as we can. But, Grinder, I want you to understand that you

aren't to play us false," went on the eldest Rover. "If you do we'll have no mercy on you, remember that!"

Half an hour later the boys and their guide set off on their first hunt for the treasure. With great care John Barrow led the way over the rocks and other rough places. He carried a long pole, which he plunged in the snow before him whenever he was afraid there was a hollow ahead. Soon they gained the spot where Dick thought the blasted tree might be located.

The snow was scraped away, first in one direction and then another, until a spot several yards in diameter was cleared. No tree-stump was brought to light, although they found a slight hollow in which were several big roots.

"This might have been the tree once," said John Barrow meditatively. "Years make great changes, you know. The trees fall, rocks and dirt slide down hill, and that makes a big difference in the looks o' things."

"All we can do is to follow the directions on the map," said Dick. "I think we'll be bound to strike the right clew, sooner or later. Let us follow this one and see where it leads to."

"What's the next directions?" questioned Tom.

"'Go due southwest from the pine tree sixty-two paces,'" answered Dick, reading from the translation given him. "Which is southwest, Mr. Barrow?"

"Soon tell ye that," answered the guide, and brought forth his pocket compass. "That way." And he pointed with his arm.

With the compass to guide them they set off, the guide in the lead once more, and Dick counting off the sixty-two paces with great care. The way was up a hillside and over half a dozen rough rocks, and then into a hollow where the snow was up to their waists.

"No use of talking, this is treasure-hunting under difficulties," was Sam's comment. "Perhaps we would have done better had we left the hunt till summer time."

"And let Baxter get ahead of us?" put in Tom. "Not much!" He turned to Dick. "What's the next directions on the paper?"

"There ought to be a flat rock here, backed up by a sharp-pointed one," answered the eldest Rover. "I don't see anything of a sharp-pointed rock, do you? The flat rock may be under us."

"No sharp-pointed rock within a hundred feet of here," answered Sam, gazing around. He began scraping away the snow. "Dirt under us, too."

"That settles it, then. Trial No. 1 is a failure. Mr. Barrow, we'll have to try the next stream."

"So it would seem, Dick. Well, you boys mustn't expect too easy work o' it. A big treasure aint picked up every day."

"The trouble of it is, we don't know how much of a treasure it is," said Tom. "For all we know, it may be but a few hundred dollars—not enough to pay us, really, for our trouble."

"Well, even a few hundred dollars aint to be sneezed at."

"We did much better out West, when we located our mining claim," said Dick. "But then we came up here for fun as much as for treasure."

The tramp to where the next stream leading from Bear Pond was located was by no means easy. They had to crawl around a tangled mass of brushwood and over more rough rocks, until they gained the bosom of the pond itself. Then they skirted the shore for several hundred yards.

"Hold on!" cried Dick suddenly. "Rabbits!" And up came his gun, and he blazed away. Sam also fired, and between them they brought down four rabbits, which had just run out of a hollow log a short distance ahead.

"Good shots!" cried the guide enthusiastically. "Couldn't have been better. I see you are used to hunting. Many a city chap would have missed 'em entirely. I had one feller up here year before last wanted to bring down big game, but when he saw a deer he got the shakes and didn't think of shootin' till the game was out o' sight."

The four rabbits were plump and heavy, and the boys shouldered them with much satisfaction. Then the onward course was resumed, until Dick again called a halt.

"Here is where we'll make trial No. 2," he said. "Now see if any of you can locate the blasted tree in this neighborhood."

All began to search around in various directions, and presently Sam let out a call.

"Here's a fallen tree!"

"Struck by lightning?" queried Dick.

"I don't know about that. Perhaps Mr. Barrow can tell us."

The others walked over, and the guide cleared the snow from the upper end of the fallen timber.

"Not much signs of being struck by anything but the wind," he announced. "Still, I aint sure."

"We'll try from this point, anyway," said Tom. "No use of missing any chance, however small." And on this the others agreed.

Once again they began to pace off the ground as before. Here the task was as difficult as ever, as they had to pass through some timber thickly intergrown with brush.

"I suppose in Goupert's time this timber was small," observed the guide.

The tramping around was beginning to tire them, and soon Sam had to stop to rest and get back his wind.

"I feel like a regular snow-plow," he gasped. "Tell you what, it takes the wind right out of a chap."

"You rest while we go ahead," suggested Tom, but Sam did not wish to do this.

"Not much! If the treasure is going to be found, I want to be on deck!" he cried.

Presently they we're at it again, Dick pacing off the steps as carefully as ever. They had still fifteen paces to go when John Barrow came to a stop with a sniff of disgust.

"Wrong ag'in!"

"How so?"

"This is leadin' us right out on the pond."

"I declare, so it is!" murmured Dick. "We started due southwest, didn't we?"

"To a hair, lad. To tell the truth, I didn't take much to this trail from the start. To my mind this stream is a new one. I think the next outlet is one of the old-timers."

Once more they held a consultation, and Tom asked how far it was to the next stream.

"Right over yonder rise o' ground," answered the guide. "But hadn't you better wait till after dinner before ye tackle it?"

Dick consulted his watch.

"I declare! Quarter to twelve!" he exclaimed. "No wonder I'm feeling hungry."

"I was getting hungry myself," said Tom "But I wasn't going to be the first to stop. What shall we do—go back to camp?"

"Yes," said Dick. "I don't like the idea of leaving Jasper Grinder there all day alone."

"Nor I," came from the other Rovers.

John Barrow was asked to lead them back by the shortest route, and they started quarter of an hour later, after all had had a chance to rest and get back their wind.

"I hope we get a chance at some deer while we are up here," remarked Dick, as they turned back.

"I'll take you to where there are deer, after this hunt is over," replied John Barrow. "I know a famous spot, and it's not far, either."

"Hark!" suddenly cried Tom. "What sort of a yelping is that?"

All listened.

"Wolves!" answered John Barrow. "There must be quite a pack of 'em, too."

"I suppose they get pretty hungry when there is such a deep snow," said Tom.

"They do. More'n likely some of 'em have scented our b'ar meat and they want some."

"If they are heading for camp, they'll give Jasper Grinder trouble," put in Sam.

He had scarcely spoken when they heard the report of a gun, followed by a louder yelping than ever.

"They've attacked him, true enough!" cried John Barrow.

"Come on," said Dick. "The sooner we get back the better. Grinder may be having a pile of trouble, and the wolves may tear all our things to pieces if they get the chance."

CHAPTER XXIX.

JASPER GRINDER AND THE WOLVES.

Left to himself, Jasper Grinder piled the wood on the camp-fire and then sat down to meditate on the turn affairs had taken.

He was in a thoroughly sour frame of mind. To his way of thinking everything had gone wrong, and he wondered how matters would terminate.

"I was a fool to come out here, in the first place," he told himself. "I ought to have known that Baxter had no sure thing of it. If I hadn't fallen in with the Rovers, I would have frozen and starved to death. And they don't want me; that's plainly to be seen."

Had he felt able to do so, he would have packed a knapsack with provisions and started oh his way down the river toward Timber Run. But he did not know how far the settlement was away, and he was afraid to trust himself alone in such a wilderness as confronted him on every hand. He did not possess much money, but he would have given every dollar to be safe back in the city again.

He wondered if the Rovers would gain possession of the treasure before the Baxter party came up, and also wondered what would happen should the two parties come together. He had not been treated very well by Dan Baxter, and so he hardly cared who came out on top in the struggle for the treasure.

"Whoever gets it will try to count me out," was the way he reasoned. "I'm at the bottom of the heap, and likely to stay there for some time to come."

The time dragged slowly, and to occupy himself he began to cut more wood for the fire. The task made him grit his teeth.

"Got to work like a common woodchopper," he muttered. "It's a shame!"

He was just dragging the last of the wood up to the fire when a sudden yelping broke upon his ears. Looking up, he saw a lone wolf standing at the edge of the timber, gazing fixedly at him.

"A wolf!" he muttered, and his face grew pale. "Scat!" And he waved his hand threateningly.

The wolf disappeared behind some brush, but did not go far. Sitting down, it let out the most dismal howls imaginable, which soon brought a dozen or more other wolves to the scene. Then all of the pack came into view, much to Jasper Grinder's horror.

"They want to eat me up!" he groaned, and ran for the nearest tree, which was close to the shelter. "Oh, I must get away, somehow!"

He clutched at the tree and began to climb with all possible-speed. His gun lay close at hand, but in his haste he forgot to pick it up. Once in the tree he sat down on a limb, a perfect picture of misery.

Seeing the man retreat the wolves at once became bolder, and keeping a safe distance from the fire, they drew up in a circle around the tree upon which Jasper Grinder rested, and from which hung the bear meat. At one point under the tree there was a spot covered with bear's blood, and this blood several of the wolves licked up in a manner to make the former teacher's own blood run cold.

"If they get at me they'll chew me up, I know they will," he moaned. "Oh, why did I ever come out in this savage waste!"

Sitting in a circle, the wolves lifted their heads and howled dismally. Two came to the tree and scratched the bark, as if to attempt climbing.

"Go away! Go away!" shrieked Jasper Grinder. "Scat! Go away!"

The wolves left the tree-trunk, but did not go away. Instead one after another began to leap up, trying to reach the meat which hung so temptingly above them. One or two prowled among the stores, tearing this and that, and picking up the scraps of the morning meal.

In this fashion half an hour went by, and it is safe to state that this was the longest and most trying half hour that Jasper Grinder experienced in his

whole life. He shouted at the wolves and threw bits of sticks at them, but to this they paid no attention. Then he cried for help, but the Rovers and John Barrow were too far off to hear him.

"If I only had the gun, I could fire it as a signal," he said to himself. "Why did I not bring it up with me?"

He wondered if he could pull the gun up by means of a string he found in his pocket, and resolved to try. Making a loop in one end of the string he lowered it with care, until it rested close to the gun, and then he did his best to slide the string along under the barrel. This was comparatively easy, for the barrel was tilted up against a rock.

The wolves watched the maneuvering with interest, and no sooner did the gun begin to shift than three leaped forward, snarling angrily. One snapped at the barrel of the piece, one at the butt, and a third at the trigger. An instant later came the report heard by the Rovers and John Barrow.

The shot was almost a deadly one, not alone for two of the wolves, but also for Jasper Grinder, who was not expecting the gun to go off. The piece was loaded with buckshot, which tore through the sides of two of the beasts, and then passed upward into the tree-branches, taking the former school-teacher in the left shoulder.

"I'm shot!" gasped Jasper Grinder, and almost fell from his perch. But he managed to save himself, and hung in a crotch, weak and almost helpless, the blood flowing freely and dripping to the ground, where the wolves licked it up eagerly. A few had retreated at the report of the gun, but now all came back, snarling and yelping more wildly than ever.

It must be confessed that Jasper Grinder's position was truly unfortunate. The loss of blood was fast rendering him unconscious, and he was in mortal terror of dropping down and being devoured.

"Help!" he called feebly. "Help! For the love of Heaven, help me!"

Just as his senses were leaving him he heard a distant cry, and looking in that direction, saw John Barrow and Dick approaching, followed by Tom and Sam.

"The wolves have Grinder treed," cried the guide. "I'll give 'em something to remember us by!"

He had a double-barreled shotgun, and he let drive twice in quick succession, firing into two groups of the beasts, and killing two and wounding several others. Then Dick fired, bringing down another. Tom and Sam also discharged their pieces, and added three others to the dead or dying.

This slaughter was too much for the remaining wolves, hungry as they were, and in a twinkle they ran off into the timber, howling dismally.

"They won't come back," was John Barrow's comment. "They have learned to respect us." And he was right, the wolves bothered them no more.

While the guide was busy finishing the beast which had been too much hurt to retreat, the boys turned their attention to Jasper Grinder. They saw he had fainted, and noticed the blood dripping from his shoulder. His body was slowly leaving the tree crotch where it had rested.

"He's coming! Catch him!" cried Sam, and as the unconscious man came down they did what they could to break his fall. Fortunately he landed in the deep snow, so the fall proved of small consequence.

"He's shot, that's what's the matter with him," said Dick, after an examination. "Who fired at him? I'm certain none of us did."

The question could not be answered. Bringing out a blanket, they placed Jasper Grinder upon it, close to the fire, and John Barrow made an examination of the wound, picking out a couple of the loose buckshot.

"He was probably shot from his own gun," said the guide. "More than likely he dropped the piece from the tree, and it went off when it struck the ground."

They bound up the wound carefully, and did all they could for the sufferer. Then, while Dick watched over Jasper Grinder, the others got rid of the wolves' carcasses by dragging them into the timber, and then set to work to prepare the midday meal.

It was fully an hour before Jasper Grinder was able to speak, and then he could say but little. But he explained how it was that he had been shot. He

wanted to know if the wolves had been driven off, and begged that they would not leave him alone again.

"We'll stay by you, now you are down," said Dick sympathetically. "We are not brutes, even though we haven't any great love for you."

"Thank you; I'll not forget your kindness," returned Jasper Grinder, and for once it must be admitted that he meant what he said.

The wounded man could eat no solid food, so they prepared for him some broth made from bear's meat, which was very strengthening. After another examination John Barrow was of the opinion that the wound was not a dangerous one, but that the man would have to keep quiet for several days or a week.

"We'll have to take turns at watching him," said Dick. "It's too bad, but I see no other way out of it."

They drew lots, and it fell to Sam to remain with the patient during the afternoon. An hour later Dick, Tom, and the guide set off to look once more for the treasure.

"Well, I'm tired enough to stay here and rest," said Sam. "That walking this morning played me out completely."

There was not much to do, since Jasper Grinder had brought in sufficient wood to last for a day or two. For an hour Sam rested and watched the former teacher, who had fallen into a doze. Then the youngest Rover set to work to improve the shelter, doing several things which the guide had suggested.

The youth was hard at work patching up one side of the improvised hut when he heard a movement in the brushwood not far away. Fearing some wild animal he ran for his gun, but ere he could reach the firearm a voice arrested him.

"Stop, Sam Rover, stop!"

The voice was that of Dan Baxter, and an instant later the bully came into view, rifle in hand, and followed by Bill Harney.

"What do you want here, Baxter?" demanded Sam, as coolly as he could, although the situation by no means pleased him.

"Are you alone?"

"No."

"Who is with you?"

"What business is that of yours?"

"I'm making it my business."

"I reckon he's alone, right enough," put in Bill Harney. "I don't see anybody else around."

The big guide rushed forward, and knocking down Sam's gun placed his foot upon it.

"Give me my gun!"

"Not so fast, my bantam!" cried the guide. "Baxter, reckon ye had better look into the shack and see what's there."

The bully did as requested. On seeing Jasper Grinder, he started back.

"Grinder!"

"Who calls?" asked the wounded man, and opened his eyes. "So it is you, Dan Baxter. What do you want?"

"What did you desert us for, Grinder?"

"I didn't desert you. I got lost, and they found me, half starved and frozen. Now I am wounded. Are you in possession of this camp? Where are the Rovers?"

"Sam is here. I don't know anything about the others. Have they found that treasure yet?"

"No. They went off to look for it." Jasper Grinder tried to go on, but fell back exhausted and could say no more.

"Here's a queer go!" muttered the former bully of Putnam Hall. "I suppose they shot Grinder. If they did, they ought to suffer for it. I guess—Hullo, what's up out there?"

A scuffle outside of the shelter had reached his ears. Bill Harney had been standing close to some firewood, and without warning Sam had rushed at the big guide and sent him sprawling backward.

"Hi! stop him!" yelled the guide, as he started to struggle to his feet. But before he could get up, Sam had taken time by the forelock and disappeared into the timber skirting the pond.

CHAPTER XXX.

A SUCCESSFUL SEARCH—CONCLUSION.

When Sam escaped from big Bill Harney he had but one purpose in view, and that was to reach Dick and the others just as soon as possible and acquaint them with the turn affairs had taken.

He had a fairly good idea of the direction the others had taken, and knew that their tracks in the snow would be plain to follow. The main thing at the start was to keep out of sight of the enemy.

In doing this, he had not only to avoid Harney and Baxter, but also Husty, providing that individual was anywhere around, which was probable. Consequently, although he traveled as fast as the deep snow permitted, he kept a sharp lookout on every side.

The youth soon circled the lower shore of Bear Pond, and he found the trail he was seeking. It led directly to the westward, and he followed it up, almost on a run.

In the meantime Dick, Tom, and John Barrow had journeyed to the third outlet of the lake, the stream which the guide thought must be the original of Perch River. Here, after a good deal of trouble, the party located what looked like the stump of a tree once struck by lightning.

"We've found it at last!" cried Dick. "I feel it in my bones that we are on the right track!"

Again they measured off the distance with care, and now came to a large flat rock, behind which was another, unusually sharp.

"The flat rock!" muttered Tom, and his heart began to thump wildly. "Dick, you're right. We are on the right track. If the treasure isn't here, it's been taken away."

They had brought along a pick and a crowbar, and now all set to work to clear away the snow, and then the dirt from around the pointed rock. The ground was hard, and at first they made but slow progress.

"Perhaps we'll have to build a fire, to thaw out the ground," suggested John Barrow.

"Oh, that will take too long," said Tom. "I wonder if we can't turn the rock over?"

With the crowbar and the pick wedged against the flat rock they pushed upon the pointed rock with all the force at their command. Several times the tools slipped, but at last they held, and slowly the pointed rock went up, until with a thud it rolled over and several feet away.

"Hurrah, a hole full of small stones!" cried Dick, and leaped down to pick the stones out. Tom followed, and so did the guide.

"Dick! Tom! Hullo! hullo!" came the unexpected cry from a short distance away.

"Who is that calling?" demanded Dick.

"It's Sam," replied the guide, looking up. "He's coming here as fast as he can track it."

"Then something is wrong," said Dick, and for the moment the treasure was forgotten.

It did not take Sam long to reach them. He was so out of breath that for several minutes he was unable to talk connectedly. At last he gasped out:

"Dan Baxter and that big guide—they attacked me and I ran away. They—they are in possession of our traps."

"Baxter!" ejaculated Dick. "That's the worst yet. They'll steal all our things and leave us to starve!"

"We might as well go right after them," put in John Barrow.

"Oh, say, let's unearth this treasure first," pleaded Tom. "If we leave that, Baxter may follow up our tracks, as Sam did, and take it from under our very noses."

"Tom is right—get the treasure first," said Dick.

Once more they set to work, Sam watching them while trying to get back his breath and strength. Soon the last of the loose stones were removed from the hole, and they came upon a thin metallic slab having in the center a small ring. They pulled the slab up and disclosed a small square opening, in the middle of which rested a metallic box, about a foot and a half square and a foot in depth. The box was so heavy they could scarcely budge it.

"The treasure at last!" came from all of the boys.

"Putty heavy, no mistake about that," was John Barrow's comment. "If it's silver it's wuth considerable!"

"We must get it out somehow," said Dick, who was as excited as anyone. "Let's get the crowbar under it."

This suggestion was carried out, and after a good deal of trouble the box was brought up out of the hole. Beneath it lay an iron key, which fitted the rusty lock of the treasure casket. Soon they had the box open, and all gazed intently inside.

"Gold and silver!" shouted Tom. "See, the gold is on top, and looks as if it had been put in some time after the silver. Wonder what the stuff is worth?"

"Some thousand dollars, that's sure," said Dick.

Now that the treasure was found the boys scarcely knew what to do with it. Then the guide came forward with a suggestion.

"We'll hide it in the snow for the present. Then the Baxter crowd won't know where it is. The empty hole will throw 'em off the scent."

A nearby place was readily found, and into this the box was placed and the snow was thrown loosely over it. This accomplished, they started back for the camp with all possible speed.

It was a long tramp, and although he did his best Sam lagged behind.

"You go on, don't mind me," said the youngest Rover. "Only keep them from running off with our goods."

It was a good half hour before the camp was reached. When they came in sight of the spot it looked deserted.

"We may as well go slow," cautioned John Barrow. "There may be some sort of a trap set for us."

They advanced with their guns ready for use, but nobody appeared, and presently they stood close to the camp-fire. Then Dick ran into the shelter, to find Jasper Grinder lying as Sam had left him.

"Mr. Grinder, where is the Baxter crowd?" he asked.

"Gone, half an hour ago," replied the wounded man.

"Where did they go to?"

"I don't know. They said something about following you up and spying on you, to see if you had found the treasure."

"Creation!" ejaculated Dick, and ran outside again. "We've made a mess of it!" he said. "They followed us up, and more than likely they've got the treasure box this minute!"

It was found that but little in the camp had been disturbed, excepting that Sam's gun had been taken off. What to do was now the question. Sam could not walk further.

"Better stay here," said Dick. "If the Baxter crowd comes back, you can hide."

Then he, Tom, and John Barrow set out to return to where the treasure had been left. They were still some distance away when they discovered Dan Baxter, Bill Harney, and Lemuel Husty making their way along the snow-covered trail. In a few minutes they came up to the party.

"Baxter, where are you bound?" demanded Dick, striding up.

"You know well enough."

"We are after thet treasure," came from Harney, and it was plain to see that he and Husty had been drinking heavily.

"The treasure is ours, Baxter, and you can't touch it."

"It will belong to whoever finds it," growled the bully.

"That's right," came from Husty. "Whoever gits it, owns it. Eh, Harney?"

"Plain truth, that is," hiccoughed the big guide.

"In that case, it is ours for sure," grinned Dick. "We have it already."

At this announcement Dan Baxter staggered back.

"It—it aint true; you're joking," he faltered.

"It is true, Baxter. Come, I will show you where the treasure was hidden—if that will do you any good. Here is the description." And Dick brought it forth and let the bully read it.

"Where's the tree?" demanded Baxter.

"There is the tree, and over yonder is the rock. We turned it over and found the treasure, just as we anticipated. It's ours, and I am simply telling you this to save you the trouble of looking further for it. Dan Baxter, you have played this game to a finish with your companions, and you have lost."

If ever there was a disappointed and angry individual, it was Dan Baxter. He raved and said all sorts of uncomplimentary things, and Husty and Harney joined in, until John Barrow told all of them to shut up or he would have the law on them.

"You had no right to make prisoners of Tom and Sam," he said. "But if you'll behave yourselves, and not bother us in the future, we'll let that pass."

To this Husty, who was a thorough sneak, consented at once, and then Bill Harney did the same. Baxter remained silent.

"You've defeated me this time," he said, at last. "But, remember, I am not done with you."

A little later Baxter moved off, and Bill Harney and Lemuel Husty went with him. It was the last that the Rovers saw of their enemies for a long while to come.

A few words more and we will bring to a close this story of the Rover boys' adventures in the mountains.

Our friends found it no easy matter to get the heavy treasure box safely to camp. In order to move it, they had to construct a drag of a treelimb and hook a rope to this, and then it was all they could do to move it along through the deep snow.

When they got the box into camp they lost no time in examining the treasure. The gold and silver amounted to twenty-five hundred dollars, and there were diamonds and other precious stones worth nearly as much more.

"About five thousand dollars, all told," announced Dick. "That is not such a bad haul, after all."

As there was now nothing more to look for, our friends spent ten days in the camp, taking it easy most of the time, and spending a day in getting back the missing sled. They went hunting twice, and the second time out Dick got a fine shot at a deer, and brought down the creature without trouble. Tom and Sam brought down considerable small game, and all voted the outing a complete success, despite the interference occasioned by their enemies.

At the end of the ten days Jasper Grinder was able to walk around, although still weak. In the meantime John Barrow had constructed a sled for the former school-teacher to sit upon, and on this he rode when they started on the return to Timber Run.

When the settlement was gained the Laning girls, Mrs. Barrow, and Addie were glad to see them back, and delighted to learn of the treasure and its value. They said they had heard of Baxter and his followers, but that all of the party had left Timber Run for parts unknown.

"Well, we don't want to see them again," said Dick. "We've had quite enough of all of them." At Timber Run Jasper Grinder left them, and the Rovers saw no more of him for many days.

The home-coming of the Rover boys was a day long to be remembered. There was a regular party given at the country home, at which many of their friends were present. The Laning girls were there, and also Dora Stanhope, and Larry, Fred, George, and a host of others, not forgetting Captain Putnam himself, who came upon a special invitation sent by Mr. Anderson Rover. Alexander Pop waited upon the table as usual, his face beaming with pleasure.

"Jes tell yo', yo' can't down dem Rober boys nohow," said the colored man to Captain Putnam. "Da is jes like apples in a tub—yo' shoves 'em under, an' up da pops, bright as eber." And the owner of Putnam Hall laughingly agreed with Alexander.

"I trust that you will never be troubled by Dan Baxter again," said Dora Stanhope to Dick, after he had told her the story of the treasure hunt.

"I trust so myself," replied Dick. "But he's like a bad cent, sure to turn up when not wanted." Dick told the truth. How Dan Baxter turned up, and what he did to bring the Rovers more trouble, will be told in another volume, to be entitled, "The Rover Boys on Land and Sea; or, The Crusoes of Seven Islands," a tale full of happenings far out of the ordinary.

But for the time being troubles were of the past, and here let us leave our friends, shouting as did the pupils from the Hall when the party broke up:

"Three cheers for the Rover Boys! Hip, hip, hurrah!"

THE END

THE ROVER BOYS

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